

MISS  
ARMSTRONG'S  
AND OTHER  
CIRCUMSTANCES  
BY  
JOHN  
DAVIDSON

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MISS ARMSTRONG'S  
AND OTHER CIRCUMSTANCES

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

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PERFERVID

THE GREAT MEN, and A PRACTICAL  
NOVELIST

BAPTIST LAKE

THE WONDERFUL MISSION OF EARL  
LAVENDER

A RANDOM ITINERARY

PLAYS

BALLADS AND SONGS

FLEET STREET ECLOGUES *Two Series*

MISS ARMSTRONG'S  
AND OTHER  
CIRCUMSTANCES

BY  
JOHN DAVIDSON

METHUEN & CO.  
36 ESSEX STREET, W.C.  
LONDON  
1896



For permission to reprint 'Some Poor Folk,' 'A Would-be Londoner,' 'An Ideal Shoebblack,' 'Among the Anarchists,' and 'The Interregnum in Fairyland,' my thanks are due to the editors of the *Glasgow Herald*, the *Speaker*, and *Good Words*. 'Miss Armstrong's Circumstances' has had an odd fate. The first portion of it appeared in the last number of the *Weekly Review*, a gallant, short-lived periodical, which I subedited in 1890 ; and the latter half was published as a complete story in the *Hawk*.

J. D.



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## MISS ARMSTRONG'S CIRCUMSTANCES.

AFTER all, my friends have been mistaken; my experiences are not nearly so exciting as they appeared to be when I saw them through their spectacles. They insisted that I had only to write down an exact chronicle of the days of the years of my life to be the author of a record as interesting as any novel. I was pretty well persuaded of the truth of their judgment when I began to write my history; but I had not proceeded far when doubts began to spring up, and by the time I had arrived at my seventh chapter, and the end of my seventeenth year, I was so tired of writing, and of my subject, that I threw my pen in the fire, and stowed away my papers in an old bandbox, out of sight and out of mind.

I have read somewhere that if a woman once falls in love, and then falls out of it,

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she has no peace until she is again swimming for life in a high-sea of passion. (I had better state here that I am just nineteen. The English master used to object to my figures of speech ; but I am writing this entirely for my own satisfaction, and mean to give my imagination free scope.) It seems to me that literary composition is like love. When one has begun to write something of one's own, it doesn't matter how disgusted one may become, one returns to the ink-pot 'like a drunkard to his cups. So, after three months, I unearthed the bandbox, and read over my seven chapters. There were only two interesting pages in the whole manuscript, and those were the two last. All the early incidents in my life which my friends thought so wonderful were of no moment to me. My birth in Paris during the siege ; the death of my father, a Scotch Socialist, on a barricade ; my French mother's penniless journey to London ; our life as beggars ; my mother's second marriage to a philanthropic City man ; my running away when I was seven, and my wanderings for a fortnight ; my attempt to poison my baby-brother with matches ; my attack on my philanthropic step-papa with

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a poker; my exile to a suburban boarding-school; my step-papa's fraudulent bankruptcy and disappearance, and the deaths of my poor mother and her little boy—all this was narrated in a dull, frigid manner, quite up to the degree of stupidity that would have registered 'Excellent' on Mr. Standard the English master's meter. (I wonder what he would think of that metaphor!) A great deal, doubtless, might be made out of my early life, and when I am older I may be able to embody it in some readable way; but in the meantime it is impossible for me to put myself in the place of the little girl I was. This is simply because I did not begin to be self-conscious until I was seventeen. When my life ceases to be as full as it has been of late, I shall doubtless be able to study myself from the beginning. At present I am driven as if by some power outside me to write an account of a certain day in my life. I don't like writing, so I am going to make it as short as I can.

First of all, I shall quote the last two pages of my manuscript:

'It was at the age of seventeen, when I found myself in a position of dependence in

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the house of a relative of my stepfather's, that I first began to look upon myself as a *circumstance*. Doubtless this notion arose from something I had read, but I have never been able to trace its origin. One night while I was sitting alone in my room, the thought came to me that the whole world was an experiment. Here was I, a tall, handsome girl, already a woman in appearance, thrust by circumstances into a family that would have preferred to do without me. Were circumstances playing off a serio-comic practical joke on this family and me? But my fancy took a higher flight. I saw circumstances in the shape of the professor of chemistry and his lean assistant shaking up folk and families, and towns and countries, in bottles and beakers; braying stubborn folks like me in mortars; precipitating, calcining, sifting, subliming, filtering powers and principalities, companies and corporations; conducting a stupendous qualitative analysis of the world. I thought, "Since it's all an experiment, how can we help it if we're miserable?" "By joining the experimenters," came the answer pat. This warmed me, and I began to pace my room. "I will

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be an experimenter," I said to myself. "I will be a circumstance, and cause things." I marched up and down for awhile, thinking how much greater I was than the Prime Minister, who had simply been tossed up there by circumstances; he was only a bit of the experiment, but I was going to be a circumstance. Suddenly I saw that my metaphor had misled me. Circumstances, I perceived, *are* the experiment; everybody and everything is a circumstance. "You donkey!" I said to myself. "You don't need to become a circumstance; you are one." Then I marched up and down the room again, feeling very miserable indeed, till I hit upon an epigram. "People are divided into two classes," I said triumphantly, as I prepared for bed: "those who are circumstances without knowing it, and those who are conscious of the fact." I lay awake for long, overpowered by the tremendous responsibility which this discovery had laid on me. The load was lifted, and I fell asleep the moment I resolved not to submit tamely like a solution or a salt, which is boiled with this, and burned with that, but to have a hand in my own experiment.'

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Two remarks I must make with regard to this paragraph. The first is about myself. I say that I was 'a tall, handsome girl, already a woman in appearance.' A romantic statement: the simple truth is that I was big, and rather stout, with a lot of brown, curly hair, pink cheeks, gray eyes, and generally pleasant to look at—at least, I know I liked to look at myself. The second remark is about the chemists who taught in the school where I was—done something to, not educated. I had, and have, no ill will to these men; it was simply impossible that I could help thinking of them in the connection. The only one of my teachers whom I disliked, and of whom I still cherish hard thoughts, is Mr. Standard, who condemned my compositions, and objected strongly to my metaphors.

Well, on the morning after my great discovery, while I was engaged in a large half-furnished room teaching the three little boys of my stepfather's relative, a loud knock came to the door, and was followed immediately by the entrance of William Somers, the eldest son. There had come between him and the oldest of my charges three

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children, but they were dead. I was much astonished to see him, because, although we were on the frankest terms, we seldom met. My astonishment increased, I even felt indignant at his masterful manner, as he gave his little brothers sixpence each, and said :

‘Be off with you ! They deserve a holiday, don’t they, Miss Armstrong ?’

The three little scapegraces needed no second bidding ; they were halfway downstairs before I had recovered my presence of mind. William Somers closed the door, and came up straight to me as if he had been sent for on important business. I stared at him blankly, and he stood dumb and blushing within a yard of me. At last he said :

‘I have a holiday. Will you come with me ?’

It was evidently not the thing he had intended to say.

‘What have you a holiday for ?’ I asked.

‘It’s a Bank Holiday,’ he said.

‘A Bank Holiday !’ I exclaimed with scorn, determined to pay him off for his intrusion. ‘What slaves you are, you and the whole of this toiling London ! Your very holidays

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you must take when they come. You can't do anything else.'

'What do you mean?' he said, crestfallen.

'Are you aware that you are a circumstance?' I asked severely.

I deeply resented the laugh, quickly smothered as it was, with which he greeted this question. I see now that it must have sounded funny to him, although after my meditation of the previous night it was a natural thing for me to say in all sincerity.

'I see that you have never realized that you are a circumstance,' I continued coldly. 'The best thing you can do with your holiday is to spend it, the whole of it, hour by hour, minute by minute, in the intensest contemplation possible to you of the fact that you are a circumstance.'

He looked at my eyes for fully half a minute, until I was forced to wink.

'You are not mad,' he said; 'and you don't seem to be joking. Still, I mean to say what I have come to say. Will you sit down?'

His coolness—which was, however, assumed—and his determined tone aggravated me.

'No,' I said; 'I will not sit down. I wish



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you to understand that *I* have fully realized that *I* am a circumstance, and I am not going to submit except to such other circumstances as please me. You are a circumstance, and don't know it. And what a circumstance! Something in the City—a broker's clerk, I suppose. You needn't tell me; I don't want to know. The prop and stay of your widowed mother and your three little brothers! Did it never strike you what a disagreeable circumstance you are? A good, respectable young man, who never misspends a penny. The very thought of you is like the taste of yarn.'

Now, I didn't mean all I said; I was simply angry without a sufficient reason, as girls and older people will sometimes be. He changed colour at my tirade, and held up his hand deprecatingly; but I went on.

'Don't interrupt me!' I cried. 'And what is it all for, all your toiling and moiling? To feed the mouths of four other circumstances, as unconscious of what they are as if they didn't exist. That's all. You're not causing anything. You're just doing exactly as thousands of others are doing—exactly as circumstances will do with you, never realizing that,

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in all regarding yourself, you are the main circumstance. An explorer, an artist, a poet, even a prime minister, attempts to cause something that is unnecessary, and that he needn't do except of his own motion—but you !'

'Miss Armstrong,' he said steadily, as I paused for breath, 'you are very excited. Won't you sit down ?'

'No,' I almost shouted. 'Don't you see that I have made up my mind not to submit? I won't be experimented on with impunity. I should like to sit down, that's true; but I refuse to yield to such a miserable circumstance. I won't be experimented on with impunity,' I repeated, liking the sound of the sentence, and thinking, with what I suppose I must call feminine inconsistency, that it would have pleased Mr. Standard.

William Somers looked very much annoyed—grieved, even. I ought to say that he was a tall man of twenty-three, with reddish beard and hair, and hazel eyes. I had not paid much attention to men up to that time, and did not know how handsome William Somers was. The trouble in his face did put me about; but, again, if paltry circumstances

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were not to be combated, how was I to challenge and overcome the great ones which hemmed me in on all sides ?

‘I see some meaning in what you say, Miss Armstrong,’ he said ; ‘but I think it is stated a little wildly.’

I felt on the point of crying, so I laughed. He looked at me inquiringly.

‘Do you know,’ he said, ‘I never heard your age. How old are you ?’

‘I was seventeen two months ago.’ That staggered him. ‘I suppose you thought I was thirty ?’

‘No ; but I thought you were twenty until you laughed just now, and then I saw that you must be younger. How precocious you are !’ he added.

I laughed again, and he saw what a stupid remark he had made.

‘I mean—your figure——’ he stammered and stuck.

‘Mr. Somers,’ I said, being now mistress of the situation, ‘I will not go with you for a holiday ; but you will come with me, and escort me in my first assault on circumstances. Observe that I make a concession in having a squire. It is a bad omen.’

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‘Your causing a bad omen is just another circumstance for you to overcome,’ he said, yielding to my humour.

‘I’ll be ready in ten minutes. Will you please get a hansom?’ I said, as we left the room.

He had not succeeded in saying what he came to say.

Mrs. Somers, a very bright, quiet little lady, looked askance at the hansom, but wished us a pleasant holiday as we drove off.

It was my first ride in a hansom, a fact which I concealed from William Somers as long as I could—about one minute, not any more.

‘You have never been in a hansom before,’ he said, looking at me in a quizzical way.

‘How do you know?’

‘At first I didn’t know, you jumped in so smartly, and told the driver where to go with such aplomb; but then, when we started, in spite of yourself, a half-happy, half-frightened look shot across your face, you sighed, and sank back, and embraced yourself.’

‘How dare you!’ I said hotly.

My feelings had never been examined to my face before, and I felt outraged, just as

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I did once when I was posting a letter at a druggist's, and a ruffian laid his dirty hand on my shoulder, and turned me round, saying, 'By Jove! a strapper and a beauty.'

'I dare do all that may become a man,' said William Somers priggishly.

'Don't talk to me any more just now,' I said.

'Very well,' he replied; and, leaning his arms on the door, he tilted back his hat, and looked with unaffected interest at everybody and everything we passed.

I have a great liking for mysteries, and often stop people who begin to explain things to me, because I really don't want to know. A great London mystery of mine is that smooth, elastic, carpet-like roadway along which our hansom glided so stealthily. I admit having thought about its composition, but I have succeeded in overcoming the desire to know of what it is made. It seemed that when we jolted over the stones, we were being wound up in some curious, uncomfortable sort of way; and then, when we reached a stretch of that London turf, I felt as if we had been discharged, and were shooting along through space. (I'm thinking of a crossbow,

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Mr. Standard.) Really, everything appeared to me delightful and interesting. I perceived for the first time what a picturesque city London is—all of it we saw that morning. The fantastic stacks of chimneys, like hieroglyphics wrought in the air; the mellow, antique streets of dwelling-houses; brick, and plaster, and paint; umber, red, and dull gold, splashed with creeping green; the squares, and graveyards, and crescents, with their trees, and sunflowers, and fountains—as if Nature were elbowing a way through the crowded buildings, Mr. Standard; and the unknown streets of shops and booths where, even on a Bank Holiday, the butchers and the fishmongers cry their wares, and the little children tumble about among mouldy old furniture on the pavements, like dirty Cupids in the lumber-room of Olympus, Mr. Standard; and the parks, with their glades, and avenues, and lakes, where Don Quixote and Sancho Panza lurk, and Robin Hood and Maid Marian, too, Mr. Standard, if you had eyes to see; and the Thames—but we didn't see the Thames that morning; and while my thoughts were still revelling in the beauty of the City, we stopped, with a jerk

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that dislocated my imagination, at the house of Herr Herman Neunzehn, Wellpark Terrace, Bayswater. When I got out, and told the driver to wait, Mr. Somers sat very still and attentive. He said nothing to me, and I said nothing to him; but I turned on the steps, and nodded my head encouragingly.

Herr Herman had been my music-master in the boarding-school, and had always had a word of praise for my efforts both in playing and composing. He was dusting his coat with his gloves preparatory to going out when I entered his room, but he received me kindly and said he could afford a few minutes.

‘I have come on business,’ I said.

‘Have you?’

‘Yes, Mr. Neunzehn. I wish to make a start in life.’

Mr. Neunzehn’s little bright eyes dashed for a moment close up to his spectacles like silver fish in a miniature aquarium, and then became dim again in the depths as he prepared a cigarette.

‘I have brought with me,’ I said, displaying a roll I had in my hand, ‘two songs, the words and music both by myself.’

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Mr. Neunzehn's fish darted past his pebbles, and he lit his cigarette.

'Will you oblige me by looking over them? and if you think them good enough, will you give me an introduction to a music-publisher?'

'I will,' said Mr. Neunzehn, taking my manuscripts, and opening them out with his diabolical fingers. He was all diabolical, but his fingers were the most diabolical thing about him—long, knotty, sinewy, as if made for strangling.

'Thank you very much,' I said, moving towards the door.

'Wait,' he replied. 'I will do it just now.'

I stood stock still and watched him as he glanced rapidly through my scores. He was much more expeditious than I liked. How could he possibly comprehend in a few seconds the full beauty of my melodies, every individual note of which had been chosen with such care out of the old cottage piano's yellow keyboard, and thumped, and stroked, and listened to, positively for hours, alone, and in conjunction with the others of its phrase, until each separate sound had



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become so charged with emotion that I couldn't hear one of them without quivering! And my chords! and the counterpoint in my symphonies! He couldn't possibly grasp the full harmony and subtlety of these without at least playing the tunes over once.

The silver fish dashed to and fro behind their glasses, and the smoke curled up through a long, thick, gray moustache as if to cure the fish; but no change in the diabolical expression hinted at a decision one way or other. When he had turned over the last page, he rolled up my manuscripts and handed them back to me, rubbed his shaved cheeks, blew a cloud of smoke that hid his face, and said:

'No, my child.'

'Why?' I faltered.

'Because they are not good enough.'

'Oh, but try them!'

'I have read them through.'

'But let me play them to you;' and I made a dash at the piano.

'No,' he said, closing the instrument. 'It would be of no use. Your music is wrong, and it would not make it right to play it.'

I said to myself: 'The battle has begun;

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here's a circumstance with a vengeance: don't give in.' Then aloud:

'If you show me the mistakes I will correct them.'

'You couldn't.'

'Will you correct them, then?' I suggested faintly.

'I never correct music except for fools whose money might get into worse pockets than mine.'

I thought I understood now.

'But I will pay you, Mr. Neunzehn,' I said sweetly, with a sudden burst of patronage, hope flaming up in my heart.

'You're a stupid little girl'—I was a foot taller than he. 'Listen.' He seized a newspaper and read: 'Some prank them up with oaken leaves; some small-pox hospitals, and banished as far as pos-tribution of articles of clothing to the heads of-pensations to large cities.'

He read slowly, making pauses and inflections as if the matter had been important; then his cigarette glowed and crackled faintly like a squib, and a cloud of smoke enveloped him, from which he emitted hoarsely the terrible sentence:

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‘That is your music.’

‘How?’ I whispered, stammering. ‘I do not understand. Will you read it again?’

He showed me the newspaper, and with his diabolical finger tracked a line of type, straight across three columns and a half. He read also, but without attempting to make it sound like sense.

‘That is your music,’ he repeated. ‘My dear young lady, amateurs come to me every week with things like that—parts of remembered words and phrases, correctly spelt as a rule, and each phrase or sentence quite grammatical, and sometimes containing bits and bobs of the most unconnected meanings; and they think they have made music. It just needs a little polishing, they know; and that is so easy for me. Look at these words again. See: out of four columns on four different subjects! Would you take that to Mr. Standard, and ask him to polish it for you, to make it into one clear sentence? Read it again. “Some prank them up with oaken leaves; some small-pox hospitals, and banished as far as pos-tribution of articles of clothing to the heads of-pensations to large cities.” You might by taking a few

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words and rejecting all the others invent a sentence. But that won't do for my amateurs. They bring me notes, and I supply the music, the meaning; but it must be with their notes. They select nonsense, and I must make it sense. I never can make it sense; but it pleases them, and I make them pay for it, I can tell you. You are young and sensible, and can learn a lesson.'

The cigarette had gone out; the fish were pressed close to the glasses, and there seemed to be more water in the aquarium than usual. The old man was pitying me, I had turned so white.

'My dear child,' he continued, 'you must not be downcast. I am like a surgeon. You come to me and ask me if you have a disease, and I tell you that you have not; that you are not a musician, and will never be one. You ought to be very glad.'

Here he sighed, and I saw that he was pitying himself. I pronounced with difficulty a heartless 'Thank you,' for I felt he was right. Then a new idea occurred to me in a flash.

'Mr. Neunzehn,' I said, 'did you look at the words of my songs?'

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‘Here and there.’

‘What do you think of them?’

‘Nothing; I am no judge.’

‘Will you look at them, and if you like them set them to music and publish them?’

‘No. Look here.’

He opened a press and showed me a pile of manuscript.

‘There are fifty songs composed by me—the best music I have written; and I cannot get one of them published. It is not my reputation. My reputation is that of a composer of pianoforte pieces.’

But I didn’t give in. I said :

‘Can you introduce me to anyone who might buy my songs?’

‘I can. Howard Dapper lives three doors from here on the right.’

My heart bounded at the name of the famous composer, and I could have kissed old Neunzehn as he wrote me an introduction.

‘My time is more than up,’ he said, handing me the letter. ‘We will go out together.’

He took no notice of the hansom, and I gave Mr. Somers another encouraging nod.

‘Dapper may be stiff,’ said Mr. Neunzehn

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at the door of the great man's house ; ' but never mind. If your songs please him he'll buy them.'

Having knocked and rung, my old music-master left me in a great hurry.

' Courage, you miserable, trembling circumstance !' I said to myself, kicking my heels in the hall till Mr. Dapper should have read the letter.

Again a little fellow, less than Mr. Neunzehn ! I thought of the tall, straight, auburn-haired man waiting in the hansom ; but I plunged into business. Mr. Dapper had received me stiffly, and I was just as stiff.

' I have with me the songs to which Mr. Neunzehn refers,' I said. ' May I read them to you ?'

' I prefer to read them myself.'

' Unfortunately, I have them set to music here, and as the music is bad, it might affect your opinion of the verses.'

' It might.'

' I know the words by heart. Shall I repeat them ?'

Mr. Dapper bowed, and I recited my songs very badly indeed. My auditor's pale, oily face and purple eyes, like a plain suet-pud-

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ding into which two raisins had got by mistake, had a dispiriting effect. The songs, which I still think fair productions for a girl of seventeen, were both pathetic: in the one a deserted maiden died; in the other, a mother's only child. When I had done, Mr. Dapper coughed, puckered his dumpling face, and delivered a short address in a juicy voice.

‘Miss Armstrong’—glancing at the letter to make sure of my name—‘your songs, I am sorry to say, do not suit me. I will be glad to look at any other verses you may have, here or elsewhere, suitable for pathetic ballads, with a little story; but death I never like introduced. If you have—a sort of musical duologue, say, to occupy about half an hour, with a good, rather startling, plot, and a little fun, I shall be glad to look at it. Or if you have a cantata for female voices only, I shall be glad to look at that; but, remember, I always like something with a story in it; and one thing I always object to—death, in the broad sense; that is, description.’

‘But death is a circumstance,’ I said, at my wit’s end. ‘It happens always.’

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‘We will not argue the point,’ he replied, with a wave of his hand. ‘If you are really anxious to succeed as a writer of words for music, you must be guided entirely by the requirements of the composer; but—and you must not take it unkindly—I do not think you will ever succeed in that way. If you wish to try, send me a cantata, or songs, or a duologue to occupy half an hour—these are things I need immediately—but I advise you not to.’

‘I will,’ I cried; ‘I will go and write them at once.’

‘I advise you not to. I am almost certain that they wouldn’t suit me.’

‘Why?’

‘I will tell you.’

Mr. Dapper had gradually dropped his professional tone and air. Some humanity had slipped into him covertly, wrinkling his brow and softening his mouth. His face looked liker a pudding than ever—a pudding that had been boiled in a cloth and creased; but no longer a plain suet-pudding; rather a plum-pudding, with the graciousness and sweetness of that Christmas delicacy. A light also shone in his eyes, as if the cook



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had lit some brandy, and I expected every minute to see a sprig of holly appear in his hair. His voice was still juicy, not with the tallowy juiciness of a suet-dumpling, but with the rich and fragrant sap of the Yule haggis—for I must ‘derange my epitaphs,’ Mr. Standard.

‘Miss Armstrong,’ he said, ‘however clever you may be, you are much too young to succeed in this kind of work. It takes a very practised writer to make a song, or else a special talent, which I don’t think you have. I shall tell you how to graduate in the school of song-making. Write a tragedy, and publish it; write an epic in twelve books, and publish it; write a volume of miscellaneous verse, and publish it; write a great novel, and publish it. The sale of these remarkable works will teach you what not to do; and besides having acquired facility with your pen, you will have expended all your idealism. Then you will be in a condition to write six original songs, which no composer will take. Then you will write one song—about sitting by the river in the moon, or walking in the wood when May is young—and a composer—this composer, possibly—will give

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you a guinea for it ; and while you are dying of consumption and starvation your song will be sung at every concert and in every drawing-room, and be well forgotten before the dandelions have grown on your grave. But '—and here, as if he had been a conjurer who performed culinary tricks with his own head, he shifted his face back into a plain suet-pudding—'but if you have a cantata for female voices only, or a duologue for a lady and gentleman to occupy about half an hour, or songs for pathetic ballads, I will be glad to look at them ; only, death I always object to—naked, absolute death, or even a broad hint.'

I don't remember getting out of Mr. Dapper's house and getting into the hansom. At seventeen hope is very fierce and reckless, and is always staking happiness against some old song or other. I wakened up out of a blank dream in the midst of the very street where, an hour before, the picturesqueness of London had dawned on me. Prisons the houses seemed, the leprous bricks stained with blood, the scanty creepers striving pitifully to cover up the loathsomeness. The fluent roll of the hansom—was it a hansom,

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or some dragon-car, sweeping along a pavement of good intentions? '*Facilis*,' I began to myself, when Mr. Standard's face in ebony, surmounted by ram's horns, flashed in at the window. My own special, private butt become a demon to torment me! What a war he had waged against quotations from pocket dictionaries! '*Fortiter in re*,' I said aloud, in frantic defiance of the fiend. '*Respice finem, Ad libitum, Cui bono!*' The ebony visage vanished; but another was peering into mine—a fresh face, with wondering hazel eyes. I was frightened at it, and turned away—to think about myself again. Why, I had only had the opinion of two men—the one old and soured with his half-success; the other middle-aged and cynical from prosperity. My music was doubtless as bad as Mr. Neunzehn said, and my songs too maudlin for Mr. Dapper; but as meaningless music and more lachrymose songs were bought and sold and sung every day, I would visit all the music-publishers in London. I laughed, and, stopping the cab, told the driver to go to one of them.

'Closed, ma'am. Holiday.'

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Then I burst into tears, and Mr. Somers directed the driver to take us home.

I drew myself together and cried quietly. The first comforting thought that came to me was, that if this had not been a holiday I would have kept William and myself on the rack for hours yet. I had given in. I did make an attempt to return to my own side. 'Circumstances,' I thought, 'are against you. To-morrow isn't a holiday, and you can resume the fight. You can even post your music.' But, deep down in my own heart, I knew I had made a mistake about myself; and gradually that thought came up, and up, and up, until I writhed and wriggled on it as if I had been impaled. I then perceived this was something very like remorse, and, feeling how unworthy it was of one who had determined to fight circumstances to go on suffering when the thing was over, I looked up at William. He was staring out of the window, with his brows knotted and his mouth set. There was pain in his eyes, and I thought at first he was ill. As I watched him a new idea came stealing on me like some melancholy music, unheard before, but strangely familiar. It filled

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all my senses like the smell of roses in the evening, and made my body feel as light as my soul. This was the new idea : he, here beside me, was not miserable for himself ; he was suffering for me. A great desire seized me to lay my head down on this man's shoulder, to feel his arms about me, and sleep or faint away ; and this desire would, I am afraid, have had its course had we not arrived home before it overpowered me.

\* \* \* \* \*

That night, in the half-furnished room, William said to me what he had failed to say in the morning. How he said it, and how I replied to him, shall never be written down. We said things that men and women say to each other only once—things high and sweet that ink would soil, and an eavesdropper mock. . . .

‘ Ho-ho, boy !’

I must end now. A little circumstance for which William and I are responsible—I *have* helped to cause something—is shouting in the next room for what nobody can give him but me.

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SANDRIDGE came to London too late for what he wished to accomplish. His ambition was to be a Londoner. It is true the Londoner is made, not born ; but, at the very latest, the process must begin at twenty-five. Sandridge was two-and-thirty when he left a North of England town, a circle of interesting acquaintances, of which he was the centre, and a roomy, old-fashioned house of his own, for London solitude and a modest apartment near Oxford Circus.

In the provincial bosom, faith, even at thirty-two, meditates Metropolitan miracles. Sandridge expected to have the London mountains removed by a Member of Parliament who was his second cousin.

‘ Ah ! ’ said the Member, ‘ you must begin to learn the ropes at a club.’

Needing for himself all the influence he

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could snatch, he resented Sandridge's unconnected state, and refused him a single bone. That is the use of the fable of 'knowing the ropes'; nobody believes in it, but it is very convenient to refer to when you are asked for assistance.

'It's a shame!' grumbled the Member. 'A man's relatives ought to be able to help him, instead of requiring help.' So he put up his cousin at an expensive new club. 'Let him find out the ropes there if he can,' he snarled to an acquaintance. 'As well there as anywhere, when you think of it, though,' he continued, reconsidering. 'Have you found out the ropes? Has anyone ever found out the ropes? No; there's no rigging about it. It's simply a huge tumbling coil of hemp and iron, all tarred with the same stick; and you get hold of a hawser-end or a chain-cable, and hang on or drop off.'

In the smoking-room of the new club, Sandridge made diffident remarks about the young Disraeli, the young Bulwer; about Count D'Orsay, about great talkers, about personalities who had been powerful outside of politics, literature, and art. These were

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the Londoners he had talked of with such confidence in the North. He and his friends had discussed their waistcoats, their eloquence, their repartees, ; their influence on fashions of dress, fashions of speech, fashions of thought.

In a month's time Sandridge's diffidence changed into taciturnity. The younger clubmen chaffed him, and called him 'the Disraelian Johnny.' He withdrew into corners and moped in ante-rooms. One afternoon Lieutenant Hopeby, of the Purple Guards, lounged in beside him. He was a very exquisite giant, twenty-three years old, guileless, as certain about everything as a child of seven ; and his forte was patronage. He felt himself an amateur Providence, and was always on the look-out for somebody to console. It was he, and Sandridge knew it, who had struck out the phrase 'the Disraelian Johnny' ; but it was also he, and he only, who had given any real attention to Sandridge's remarks.

'Well, old chap,' began Hopeby, in his paternal way. 'Let's have a comfortable talk. How do you get on? Do you find yourself becoming a regular Londoner?'



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Sandridge blushed to the roots of his hair, but he was quite powerless. He thought, writhing mentally, how Disraeli would have touched this youngster with a point of flame able to drill a passage even through his armour-plating of conceit, whereas he hadn't a leaden dart to throw.

'I am afraid,' he stammered, 'I am too old. "Art is long, and life is short," you know.'

'But you mustn't say that,' replied the Purple Guard kindly. 'Look at—what's his name?—the old Roman who began to learn Greek on his deathbed. It's never too late to learn, as the penitent thief said. But what's your difficulty, Sandridge?'

'Nobody ever asks me anywhere; I never have a chance to——'

'To what? Come, old chap.'

'Well,' said Sandridge, shifting uneasily in his chair, 'it's not like me to talk in this way—ah—Hopeby; but I seldom have a chance to talk to anybody now. I'm awfully ambitious.' He could have bitten his tongue off at every word. 'You've heard my idea of the Londoner, his place and power. My intention is to be a Londoner of that kind. I have educated myself for such a position by

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the study—by many studies ; just as one is educated to take Orders, or for the Army. But I get no opportunity to—to exercise my functions.'

'Hard on you—eh? But I say, you know, you're quite an original, Sandridge. It's a new branch ; department's nothing to this. You should have a professorship, my boy ; teach them to be Londoners. I saw an article in a paper the other day : "Wanted—a new occupation." Here you have it : "The art of being a Londoner—in twenty lessons." You could charge what you like ; and you'd get it—for a time.'

'But I'm demoralized,' rejoined Sandridge, overlooking Hopeby's banter. 'The fellows here don't understand me.' Then he added very slowly, measuring his words that sometimes faltered, and with eyes that flickered between confidence and timidity : 'I take it that I have not yet met a foeman worthy of my steel. At a dinner of celebrities I believe I could at once make my mark.'

The Purple Guard sat up, and stared at Sandridge for fully a minute.

'Yes,' continued Sandridge, misunderstanding the other's silence, and feeling, to

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his own surprise, as secure as a man who had led the ace of trumps for the last trick—‘yes, Hopeby; my place is in those circles where conversation is understood. Here every man is full of himself and his own little affairs. They talk of the club *cuisine*, of their regiment, of an actress, or of a billiard-player; a thought, an epigram, only makes them raise their eyebrows. I feel among you like an eagle in a dovecot.’

The Purple Guard sat back, and watched Sandridge through his eyelashes.

‘Conversation is like piano-playing,’ went on the would-be Londoner, ‘and is not truly valued except by virtuosos. Most of you fellows, now, would as soon hear a piano-organ as Paderewski. I have practised talking; we used to practise it for hours daily in the North—the genial initiative, the sudden digression, the calculated repartee, the retort in ambush, the fitted apologue, the grooved anecdote, the cascade of words, the slow sententious movement, the intolerant harangue; we had an art and practice of talk with a terminology all our own. Yes, Hopeby; I have it in me to make a great name as a conversationalist.’

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The Purple Guard sat up again. His surprise was over. It took this young man a very short time to docket and dismiss any revelation of character.

‘You’re one of the queerest chaps I ever met, Sandridge,’ he cried ; ‘and I’ll tell you what I’ll do for you. You know my uncle, the Pope?’

‘Your uncle, the Pope?’

‘I see you don’t. Major Hopeby-Bonner, my uncle, is one of the best talkers in London—or has that reputation, which is better. Somebody of consequence whom he snubbed called him the Pope, and the name stuck. Now, he’s dining here with me to-night. You come too, and the pair of you can talk for a wager.’

Sandridge accepted in a faint voice. He wished that it had been anybody but Major Hopeby-Bonner’s nephew who had asked him, because he would have preferred to decline the invitation. He and his friends had discussed the Major ; his novels, poems, and essays had all been declared inferior—the work of a callow amateur. Rumours of his gifts as a talker had also reached the North, and it had been decided that he was

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a mere *farceur*, on a level with the jester of antiquity. Sandridge had imagined himself brushing off like flies such people as Major Hopeby-Bonner; to be asked to meet him as a man of the first importance blew the foundation-stone out of his ærial castle. But he quickly built another one, told himself it would be practice, went to his room, drank tea, and dipped into lives of Carlyle, Beaconsfield, Macaulay, and Houghton, till dinner-time.

The Purple Guard introduced Sandridge to his uncle as 'a talking chap, too.' Sandridge, perspiring, wondered what Carlyle would have done in such a circumstance.

Major Hopeby-Bonner, like most garrulous people, was a reticent, bashful man, who plunged into speech because silence was accompanied with the discomfort of greater self-consciousness.

'Talk,' said the Major, 'is diluted silence. I confess I could never carry more than a thimbleful of neat silence in an evening.'

'The idea,' rejoined Sandridge, very white, and in an unsteady voice, but wishing to say something strong at once, 'is—ah—hardly—

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is not—quite—— It might have been phrased differently.'

He was thinking that Beaconsfield would never have used such a commonplace image.

'It might,' assented the Major, much amused. 'How would you phrase it?'

'Well, I would have said,' stammered Sandridge, 'that—you remember Carlyle—— Really, I think there is nothing to beat the proverb, "Silence is golden."'

'A good proverb. But what is the connection?'

'The connection? Eh—we were talking of silence; at least, I think so.'

The Major smiled, and went on with his soup; and the Purple Guard said, half aside to Sandridge:

'Bravo! That must be the retort in ambush—eh? You've floored him; he hasn't a word to say, you see.' He added: 'What do you think of London, Sandridge?'

'It's—very big,' stammered Sandridge; 'and enormous crowds and buses, and—I understand the fogs are dreadful.'

He had no idea of what he was saying; he was going over in his mind the sentences that had passed between himself and the

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Major, trying to improve or explain away his own ineptitude.

‘Ah! the slow sententious movement,’ murmured the Purple Guard.

‘I have been in London half my life,’ said the Major; ‘and yet the mere speaking of the word “London,” the overhearing it said casually, often thrills me with a sense of terror, and wonder, and delight.’

‘Mesopotamia,’ trolled the Purple Guard.

Sandridge, still several remarks behind time, struck in :

‘The connection, Major Hopeby-Bonner, between what you said about silence and what I said is perhaps, at first sight, not very evident, but——’

There he paused, and for the life of him could not resume his sentence.

‘We’re waiting for the “sudden digression,”’ said the Guardsman; and the Major smiled encouragingly.

But it was all over with Sandridge; he went hot and cold, turned ghastly pale, pleaded illness, and withdrew.

That was his last appearance in a club or any haunt of men for a long time. He ceased all correspondence with his old friends; he

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hid away his biographies and books of table-talk, took all his food in his own room, walked about the streets at night muttering to himself, grew gray and bent, and was watched by the police. One autumn evening, feeling that actual madness beset him in his solitude, he slipped into the concert-room of the Café Cosmopolite. The band had just ceased playing a selection from 'Il Trovatore,' and the crowd was somewhat subdued. Many noticed Sandridge, and were moved by his appearance. His furtive life had given him a stealthy, gliding motion. His grizzled hair, which he wore long, had gone off his forehead, and showed a high brow; his beard was also long and wizard-like. His slender, stooping figure, pale face, and deep-set, haunted eyes, interested some spectators, and made others uneasy. He felt the impression he created, and was gratified. Next night he returned, and soon formed a habit of dining at the Café Cosmopolite every evening. He enters a cold, self-centred figure, with wolfish, wandering eyes, like those of one who had been racked, and glides to his chosen seat. Women catch their breath as he passes, and all who see him for the first time ask who he is. Some



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think him like a picture of Christ; others, like Mephistopheles. The waiters know nothing of him, but tell country visitors that he is this, that, or the other celebrity, according to fancy. He must be served in silence; points out on the card and the wine-list what he requires, and eats ravenously. He is never heard to utter a word except 'Go away!' if, as sometimes happens, a waiter forgets and addresses him.

He is the type of failure, and a legend begins to grow round him. His ambition was paltry, but he pursued it highly. Defeated in his effort to be first, he refused any other place; and it is this element of greatness in his character which makes him now so impressive an apparition in the Café Cosmopolite.

## SOME POOR FOLK.

### I.

**I**T was at Barming, on an autumn afternoon in 1893, that I lighted on a hop-picker's encampment; thirty-seven white tents gleaming in a white field. Half the people were in their tents, and the remainder divided between the public-house and the pay-office. The hop-pickers' day is a short one—from seven till four, with half an hour or an hour's interval. The early stoppage is necessary, because the day's picking has to be measured, and that is a tedious process.

I went into the encampment and sat down beside a man, apparently a little over middle-age, who was lounging at the door of his tent. A little fellow of three romped about him, and a girl of fourteen was lighting a fire of sticks. The man had a pleasant, clean-shaven face, and dark, dancing eyes. He replied bashfully to my salutation, but

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seemed well pleased that I should speak to him. Hardly had we started a conversation when a woman came up dressed in rusty black. She said a few words aside to the man, and was about to move away, but remained when I asked her if she liked this outdoor life.

‘Well,’ she said, ‘I shall have a few shillings over when the picking’s done, and I had no money at all when I came.’

‘She’s just out of hospital,’ said the man.

‘Yes, sir,’ she went on; ‘I had pleurisy, and have been in hospital for months.’

‘She was once better off,’ interjected the man in a half-aside. ‘She kept a lodging-house in Kensington.’

‘A tent is hardly the place for a convalescent—from pleurisy, too,’ I said.

‘That’s true,’ she assented; ‘but when I came out of hospital a fortnight ago I had only two or three shillings in my pocket, and no home, and no friends. I had been hoping when I was a girl, and I knew if I could get down here I wouldn’t starve for a week or two. My money brought me down and no more. I have no bedding and no clothes but what’s on me; and I’ve got to

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keep extraordinar' clean to be clean.' (She looked very clean and tidy.) 'At night without bedding it's very cold in the tent, and if he,' nodding to the man, 'didn't give me two coats to put over me I would be frozen. I'm always glad when the morning comes. Cold as I am, though, it's colder still when I get up and out; it's like going into the sea. It makes me nimble, I can tell you. I light the fire and make the tea, and then we all get up.'

'All!' I said. 'How many are there of you?'

'Nine,' replied the man. 'There's me and the missus and the three children; mother here, a young couple, and a lad.'

'Then you came down in company?'

'No; we never saw each other till the overseer put us together in this tent.'

'But I thought that hoppers travelled in companies?'

'Many of them do; but there's lots of couples and families and singles that come down independent.'

The convalescent left us on some errand, and when she had gone the man said some things about her, chiefly in praise of her spirit and her good-nature.

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‘She’s no home to go to, and I think she’ll go back with us for the winter. My daughter there, she’s fourteen and can go out to service; and the old lady would be a great help in the house, and her meat wouldn’t be missed.’

I asked if I might be allowed to look into the tent. The man laughingly permitted me; but there was nothing to see. A thick carpet of clean dry straw, some bundles of bedding, a perambulator, and a few metal and earthenware plates constituted the entire plenishing, the pots and pans being outside. I asked him if he really liked camping out.

‘Yes,’ he replied, ‘I like it very well. I’ve always been a roving blade. I ran away from home when I was fourteen, and have turned my hand to many a thing. I’ve been a painter, a docker, a barber, a carpenter. I was in a country post-office for three years, and I was in the Customs on the hop-duty before the tax was taken off. At home I’m a painter again, but I’m too old to be on the market; besides, my health’s giving way, and I can do only half a man’s work.’

‘How old are you? You don’t look over fifty.’

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‘I’m sixty-three, sir. I know I don’t look it in the face; but my back’s giving way.’

‘Then this little three-year-old will be your grandson?’

‘No, my son; and there’s a baby eight months old. I’m married to my second wife, and she’s thirty years younger than me. She was a cook in a good family. I painted her kitchen once, and we made it up. She’s a good wife, and a good cook, is my missus. She makes sixpence go as far as half-a-crown, and the Queen might eat the dinners she turns out.’

During my talk with the hop-picker there had been a constant coming and going through the gap in the paling by which I had entered the encampment. Those who came were returning from the pay-office, and those who went were mostly going away for good.

‘Why do they give it up,’ I asked, ‘when there’s plenty of picking to be done yet?’

‘Well, you see,’ the old man replied, ‘they’ve just been paid; they’ll have from ten shillings to a pound in their pockets; and they know that though they were to

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stay here hop-picking for a year, they would never have any more to go away with in the end. They're tired of it already, too, and away back to Whitechapel or the Borough.'

'How long have they been at it?'

'About a fortnight.'

'And couldn't they have another ten shillings or so to add to what they have saved at the end of another fortnight?'

'But they didn't save what they have, or they wouldn't have it; it was saved for them. You see we're allowed to draw small sums as we need them while we're working, and when the job's done we get the balance. Most of the folks you see going away know quite well that they're sure to spend all they have before they would think of working again, and so they're off home to take it out in gin crawls. Some of them may come back again and get another turn.'

'Will you cut my hair to-day, then, old un?' cried a gruff voice suddenly.

'I will,' said my new acquaintance, after a moment's hesitation, springing up into a long stooping figure that seemed hardly to belong to his fresh face.

The new-comer sat on the ground, and

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the old man cut his hair in a thoroughly workman-like style.

‘A soldier?’ I queried, judging from the manner of the man and his moustache.

‘Yes, guv’nor,’ he replied. ‘All that.’

‘Been in active service?’

‘Boer expedition.’

‘Killed your man?’

‘That would be hard to tell. *I* got a scratch on my arm.’

‘Pension?’

‘Some coppers a day.’

When his elf-locks were trimmed the soldier gave the barber threepence.

‘Your charge is a penny,’ he said; ‘but if you hadn’t done it I’d have had to pay threepence in a shop. Good-day, guv’nor.’

He was not at all a bad kind of man. He span no yarns, and the laconic bluster of his speech was original.

Shortly after he was gone a shrill outcry arose in the road, and in a second or two a hale old woman of about seventy entered the field by the gap in the paling. She was alone, complaining aloud to the heavens and the earth.

‘He says he’ll keep my clothes,’ she said.



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‘But he can’t—he can’t do it. Seven shillings! I’ll give him no seven shillings.’

She was hobbling past the tent at which I sat when she caught sight of me, an unusual apparition in the encampment. She stopped promptly, and came up. Her face, which was still comely, was as white as paper, her mouth worked, and her big, hard, blue eyes had a steely light in them.

‘Master,’ she cried, clenching her hands, ‘he says he’ll keep my clothes—the pole-puller says he’ll keep my clothes if I don’t give him seven shillings. But he can’t do it; there’s no law for it—is there, master?’

‘Surely not,’ I said.

The woman was beside herself with fury; it would have been folly to ask what she meant.

‘No; he can’t keep my clothes!’ she shrieked; and trudged away to her own tent.

The man beside me knew what was wrong; the explanation will be better understood after a description of the method of hop-gathering.

The hop-pickers work in what are called ‘bins-companies.’ The bin is a wooden frame divided into two compartments lined with sacking. One picker, who may have as much help as he or she chooses, is responsible for

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each compartment. Five bins are counted to a company; and a man, called a pole-puller, is told off to keep each company supplied with hops. This he does by uprooting the pole on which the vine grows.

‘And what claim can the pole-puller have on this old woman?’ I asked.

‘He has none; but he thinks he’ll get a shilling or two out of her. She cooked his dinner, and washed his shirt for him; and in order that she mightn’t lose anything, he picked for her every day while she was off duty, as you might say. And now he wants seven shillings.’

‘But the arrangement was—wasn’t it?—that he should pick for her in return for her cookery?’

‘Yes; but he thinks he’ll make more of it, you see.’

‘But that’s very unfair.’

‘I say it’s damned scoundrelly, sir, to keep the old woman’s blankets.’

‘Master, he can’t keep my clothes—can he?’ shrieked the old woman, reappearing suddenly from behind the tent.

‘Certainly not,’ I said.

‘No, sir; he can’t,’ she continued. ‘He

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wants seven shillings, but I'll not give him a sixpence. I'll get the policeman ;' and away she went to the village again, an embodiment of concentrated rage, the consciousness of the justice of her cause lighting up her old worn face.

I have never seen a fiercer blaze of indignation ; there was divinity in the clear fire of wrath that burnt in her eyes against the wrong-doer. She was not thinking of her blankets ; she was consumed with a great, simple anger at dishonesty brought directly home to her.

My companion and I sat silent for several minutes after the old woman was gone. Two carriages rolled past on the highway, above which the field of the encampment ascended about twenty feet. Shouts and laughter, oaths and screams, rose from most of the tents behind us, and fainter cries came from the village inn about a furlong away. Couples and parties passed out and in, discussing and quarrelling. I saw only one amicable couple among those who left the encampment—an old soldier gave his old wife his arm, and they smiled to each other and talked quietly, walking sedately to the station.

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‘They’re for Woolwich,’ said my acquaintance. ‘I shaved the man this morning. He told me they’ve made enough to lay in a ton o’ coal for the winter.’

The sloping sun got free of the clouds that began to redden, and a ruddy tinge of evening touched the trees and the distant smoke-wreaths of the oasthouses. The fire which the hop-picker’s daughter had heaped up with faggots hummed and sang softly all in a clear flame, and a big pan of water above it began to keep a low antiphone of liquid sounds. On the highway the shadows grew long; homing birds flew across the valley of the Medway; far away on the undulating horizon darkness flickered up faintly, the early dawn of night.

‘He can’t keep my clothes; the policeman says I’m not married to him!’ cried the wrathful old dame, once more appearing through the gap in the paling. ‘Master,’ she cried, for the third time stopping before me, ‘the policeman says I’m not married to him, so he can’t keep my clothes. I’ll give him no seven shillings.’

We heard her exclaiming triumphantly all the way through the encampment, ‘The

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policeman says I'm not married to him ! The policeman says I'm not married to him !'

In a few minutes she returned, exclaiming :

' I'll bring the policeman—I'll go and bring the policeman. He can't keep my clothes ; I'm not married to him.'

She stopped, however, at the paling, and held on to it for a second or two. Then she turned, and, gulping down a tempest of sobs, muttered, ' I'll give him half-a-crown.' This time she did not look near me ; she felt herself beaten—that she was yielding to injustice. She slunk away at that moment, one of the most wretched of all creatures under the sun. She was a strong old woman, in good health, and better dressed than most of her companions ; but the poorest and most thriftless of them all was happier than she, with her divine sense of justice unappeased, and forced to yield to wrong. A compromise must have been effected ; for I saw her later on with all her belongings on the road to the station, dejected but scornful.

' Here's my missus,' said the man, smiling to a comely dame, who came up and clinked down beside us.

Her baby was at her breast—a fine, fat

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little fellow, fair, and already looking like his mother. I asked if the child did not incommode her much at her work.

‘Oh no!’ she said, and showed me how she fastened him in a shawl round her waist while she picked the hops.

I remarked on his capital condition. She rejoined that he *was* a lusty little chap, and added naively, ‘This was my Christmas-box.’ She then produced her tally-book, and counted out half a sovereign and some shillings and coppers to her husband. He counted them over, too, and returned them to her.

‘I’ve had a bit o’ luck, besides,’ said the woman. ‘Two shillings for bin-money.’

Her husband congratulated her, and told her of *his* earnings with his scissors and razor. Bin-money, I learnt, was an extra payment, sometimes given and sometimes not, to those who looked after their own bin, dragging it about from place to place as required. I bought the woman’s tally-book, and have it before me now. Between August 21 and 29—the hop-harvest was most exceptionally early in 1893—she and her step-daughter pulled 136 bushels of hops, the greatest quantity on one day being 27 bushels, the least 11. A

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shilling for 6 bushels gives 22s. 8d. From August 30 to September 4, they pulled 89 bushels, for which, as the hops were of a better quality, they were paid at the rate of 1s. for 5 bushels. That gives roundly 17s. 10d. The fortnight's earnings of this family, exclusive of what the father made by barbering, and including the mother's bin-money, amounted to £2 2s. 6d., to which must be added the rent of the tent, and the cost of the straw, firewood, and water provided gratis by the hop-grower. During the fortnight they had drawn 24s., so that they were 17s. 6d. to the good.

‘Not much for a family, is it?’ asked the goodwife; but she spoke with a cheerful laugh, and told her daughter to bring the tea, which had been infusing for some time.

A brown bowl and a tin mug was all the tea-service they had. The ‘tinny’ was given to the three-year-old, as he was growing fractious, and the brown bowl was handed to me. I offered it to the woman, but she rejected it peremptorily. She blushed, indeed, and looked ill-pleased, as if she imagined that I entertained some idea that she did not know how to treat a guest. I drank the

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whole bowlful, and it then went round ; the woman first, then her husband, and lastly the girl, who seemed to be on the best of terms with her step-mother.

When I left, the man said :

‘ I’d be very glad to come across you again some day.’

The words are not polished, but the tone and manner were courtesy itself. They were brave folk, that family of hop-pickers—brave and courteous.

### II.

IN one of those old-fashioned third-class carriages open from end to end, my sole companion from Cannon Street in the 11.17 main-line Kent train was an odd-looking little man with a weather-beaten face and a twisted Roman nose. There was a compartment between us, but he kept tossing inarticulate remarks across it to me ; he was quite cheerful, and apparently indifferent as to whether I heeded or understood. At every stoppage he thrust his head out of the window, and hailed one or other of the railway officials, who all seemed to know him. I changed at Dunton Green for Brasted, and he changed,



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too. From the luggage-van of the train we came in, he received a large deep basket, which he placed upon a form on the platform directly opposite the compartment of the local train in which I had taken a seat. Having lifted out of the deep basket a shallow tray-basket, which fitted like a lid, he proceeded to line the latter with an old *Daily Telegraph*. Then from the bottom of the deep basket he took several large brown-paper bags, and emptied their contents into his tray—shrimps as pink as coral, and as fresh as the dawn. The tray filled, he replaced it within the deep basket, disposed neatly of the overlapping newspaper, and got into the train with his stock-in-trade. I left my compartment at once, and went into his.

‘What price shrimps?’ I said.

‘Thrippence a pynte,’ he replied.

I gave him threepence for permission to eat as many as I wanted between Dunton Green and Brasted, a distance of about two and a half miles.

‘Where were they caught?’ I asked.

‘Mawgyte.’ (Margate.)

‘And where did you buy them?’

‘Billinsgyte.’

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‘And do you make a living by selling shrimps in the country?’

‘I tries to.’

‘I don’t see how it can pay you. How many have you here?’

‘Four gallons.’

‘What did you pay for them?’

‘A shillin’ a gallon.’

‘And then there’s the train?’

‘Yus; abart siving shillin’ I lays hout on.’

‘And you sell at threepence a pint?’

‘Ho, well, you know, I suits my pryce to my cusermers. When I goes to a big haowse I charges fo’pence; and this little measure has yer see, theer’s four on ’em to the pynte; but one’s a penn’orth, and I sell lots o’ penn’orths.’

‘Then I suppose you can calculate on having fourpence a pint over all?’

‘I dessay.’

‘Well, then: your expenses are about seven shillings; you sell four gallons: let me see—thirty-two pints, that is, at fourpence, and thirty-two fourpences is barely eleven shillings. Four shillings a day—twenty-four shillings a week?’

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‘Yus; abart it. And I’ve seen the tyme when I made a quid a dye.’

‘Selling shrimps?’

‘Sellin’ shrimps. And naow I wouldn’t complyne of a quid a week. It’s just a chawNSE.’

‘People don’t buy shrimps as they used to do, then?’

‘I surpouse so; but I dun’no. I know I does my best. Yer see me come in at Cannon Street? Well, I syve sixpence by comin’ in at Cannon Street. If I come in at London Bridge I ’ev to pye fur my bawskitt. Theer’s no squarin’ of ’em theer; sixpence yer ’ev to pye. But at Cannon Street I give ’em an ’andful o’ shrimps, and they tyke my bawskitt fur nothin’.’

‘I see. And do you live in London?’

‘Yus; I live near the Elephant an Cawstle.’

‘And sell shrimps all the year round?’

‘Ho no; in the winter I sells muffins an’ crumpets, with a board an’ a green cloth, an’ a bell—yer know the sort.’

‘Does it pay any better than the shrimps?’

‘Abart it. Whort I ses is this: let hevery

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man myke a livin' in 'is own wye, and don't be too bloomin' pertickler 'ow 'e does it. That's squar' an' honest, an' no mistyke abart it. Do yer own do, an' don't you be too pertickler 'ow yer does it. Thet's whort mykes powperses—bein' too pertickler.'

The shrimp-seller's advice was a little ambiguous, but I am certain his meaning was good. I left the train at Brasted, and he went on to Westerham to rouse the sleepy echoes with his Cockney cry, 'Shrimps, fresh every dye! Shrimps fresh to-dye!' His shrimps were good. The few I ate had a delicate briny flavour, and they melted in the mouth like a curd, or some confection of the foam of the sea.

In the afternoon of the same day, on the slope of Ide Hill, I halted beside a big building like a factory, standing close to the road. I found it to be the Sundridge Union, and I copied the following:

*'Notice to Vagrants.*—Task of work for casual paupers who are detained for more than one night. Males: For each day of detention the breaking of one ton of stone shall be broken to such size as the Guardians, having regard to the nature thereof, may

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prescribe ; or the picking of four pounds of unbeaten, or eight pounds of beaten, oakum. As regards females, for the day of detention the picking of two pounds unbeaten, or four pounds of beaten, oakum ; or nine hours' work in washing, scrubbing, and cleaning, or needlework.'

Official writings have always interested me, and I was still endeavouring to arrive at the literary point of view of the composer of this notice, when it occurred to me that *I* was a vagrant. I began immediately to consider whether I should have my oakum beaten or unbeaten, or whether it might not be better to have the ton of stone. Oakum I knew nothing about, but stone—I had once broken stone. It was on the low road to Alloa, near Cambus, that I wielded the stone-hammer for a quarter of an hour. The old man was very dubious when I asked to be allowed to try my hand, and not without reason, for there is an art in stone-breaking ; and although I followed the instructions given as closely as I could, my quarter of an hour's hard labour ended with the fracture of the hammer-shaft. That was more than twelve years ago, and I remembered how astonished I

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was when the old man told me that he was paid half-a-crown the yard of stone, and that able-bodied men could make, and did make, sometimes ten or twelve pounds a month.

While these reflections were passing through my mind, I saw a young man approach the gate from the workhouse. He was dressed in corduroys, with brass buttons and a soft felt hat. I hailed him as he passed through the gate, and asked if they had many casuals. It was some little time before he understood my question, and in making him understand it I perceived that his mind was somewhat alienated.

‘Oh yes,’ he said at last. ‘There be a lot of them—twenty or thirty of a night.’

‘So many as that?’ I said.

‘As near as it might be. I don’t know as I know how many, but there’s always a lot of them.’

I asked him if twopence would be of any use to him, and he said very heartily that it would.

‘I can buy some sugar or a little tea,’ he said.

‘How can you do that?’

‘A gentleman brings us things. I don’t

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know what he is ; he's a sort of postman, if so be you understand, sir. He brings letters, although he hasn't signed any pledge or written his name down, and he brings things for us when we have money. This will get me a pound of sugar, sir.'

' Don't they give you enough sugar ?'

' Well, not to say enough, sir. I'm in the old men's ward through me taking fits. And we have tea and bread and butter for breakfast ; in the young men's ward they have only hot water.'

' How old are you ?'

' I'm seventeen ; my father was an engine-driver, and he was killed on the railway, and I lived with my grandfather from the time I was five. I'm a bit of a blacksmith ; my grandfather was a blacksmith, and a good one, too, and I came on remarkable well. I could make a clout-nail and an S hook and a staple, when I had to come here because of me taking fits. I'm a very good boy for work, but I fell down a well in a fit, and my grandfather died, and they brought me here.'

' Where did you live ?'

' In Seven Oaks Weald, not far from here, and my grandmother lives there still. I

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hope and trust I shall have a holiday soon. I haven't had a fit for a month, and if I keep well I shall have a holiday. If so be you have clothes of your own to go away in you can have as long a holiday as you like ; but if so be you have only the workhouse clothes, then you can have only——'

I forget how long he said.

'Is your mother alive?'

'Yes, sir, and I haven't seen her for three years. She's something in a waiting-room in London—no, Southampton—she's in Southampton, and I do hope and trust to see her this summer. She is coming to see my grandmother. But my grandfather's dead. They said he cheated with picks, and didn't steel them ; but he didn't, sir—he wouldn't do such a thing.'

'What do you mean?'

'Instead of steeling the picks proper, they said he only cut a slot and pretended to ; but he didn't, sir, he didn't.'

I gave him a shilling, being much pleased with him ; but the effect on him was distressing. He sidled up to me, laid his hand on my arm, and spoke quite incoherently. In a second or two he calmed down, however,



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and told me that he would keep the shilling until he got his holiday, and buy something for his grandmother, 'as it might be a loaf, or sugar, or some matches.'

When I shook hands with him, he said he hoped to see me again, 'and I'll give you something—if so be I have it, sir.'

As soon as he had gone, another workhouse inmate—an old man this time—came out of a field and asked for tobacco. I gave him twopence, which he took, and set off up the road at a frantic pace. Then two little boys of six or seven appeared, and two women, one very old, the other middle-aged. The elder had the bleached face of a washer-woman; toothless gums, heavy underlip, and sunken eyes, with an unearthly leer in them.

'I'm a poor orphan,' she said, 'and have nobody to look after me or give me sugar.'

The other woman—the middle-aged one—had coal-black eyes that seemed about to dance out of her head, and she carried in her arms a large doll in the cap and long clothes of a baby. She spoke, too, but it was impossible to make out what she said, as she had no palate. She had lost also half the teeth on the left side of the upper jaw, and

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half the teeth on the right side of the lower one. Those that remained were very large, and as she opened her mouth wide in trying to speak, the effect of her whole appearance was grotesquely horrible. She also talked of sugar; I made out so much as that.

‘Neither have i anybody to give me sugar,’ piped each of the little boys.

I gave both of the boys a penny, and they ran off at once with a hurried ‘Thank you.’

The epileptic youth had been dazzled with the present of a shilling, and so I experimented with one on each of the women. The older of the two leered incredulously, studied the shilling, lifted it to her lips as if to bite it (forgetting that her teeth were gone), then turned and scuttled away at the top of her speed. The middle-aged woman stared at the coin and me alternately, bobbed a steep country curtsy, and went off slowly and without a sound, rocking her doll. The idea of happiness, the delight of life, seemed here to have dwindled down with young and old, sane and insane, into a desire for a little more sugar. This is the tragic farce that puzzles, and will perhaps always puzzle: the vicissitudes and fate of the paragon of animals.

## AN IDEAL SHOEBLACK.

I THINK I could count the number of times a shoeblack has operated on my boots. Yet men who have had their boots shoeblacked almost every day of their lives have never encountered anything like a certain experience of mine.

One afternoon I placed my foot on the box of a particularly intelligent-looking shoeblack a little way up a street on the north side of the Strand. Wishing if possible to find out what had brought a man with a good forehead and a face of some refinement so low in the social scale, I said :

‘ You look thoughtful.’

‘ Not thoughtful,’ he replied. ‘ Melancholy.’

‘ Melancholy !’ I echoed. ‘ Yes ; yours, I should imagine, is a melancholy calling.’

‘ You imagine rightly,’ said the shoeblack. ‘ Melancholy ? I should think so ! You may

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say, now, that policemen are melancholy. Well, they have certainly a kind of melancholy, for there is no other word that can rightly apply to the mental condition of those knights of the street; but wherein their melancholy differs from the true melancholy of three hundred years ago, it would be hard to say.'

I was astonished, and, leaning forward, rested my arms on my knee to obtain a closer view of this extraordinary shoeblack.

'What is the difference,' I asked, 'between the policeman's melancholy, and the melancholy of the sixteenth century?'

'The difference, sir,' replied the shoeblack, 'lies deep enough, beyond a doubt. It may, perhaps, be found in the fact that the mind of the modern man is much more alert, because more occupied about ways and means than the ancestral mind could have been. Inspector Bucket, for example—in "Bleak House," sir—has a brilliant intellect compared with Dogberry—"Much Ado," sir; but however excellent in the quality he professed Bucket may have been, he lacked the gift of imagination. Dogberry, on the other

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hand, was of imagination all compact; so imaginative was he that in the midst of all the tediousness he found it in his heart to bestow on Leonato, he was able in four words to predict Sarah Gamp.'

'Sarah Gamp! What do you mean?'

'Yes, sir, Sarah Gamp. Lord Tennyson was once detected in the act of divination. In the "Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington" occurs the line, "The last great Englishman is *low*," which a certain writer has indicated as a prediction of the greatness of the late Lord Sherbrooke. That was very good prophecy; but it cannot be compared with Dogberry's far-seeing vaticination. "It shall be suffigance," he said. If in that brief sentence Dogberry does not give a distinct hint of the deathless Sarah "deniging," "suppoging," and using her soft "g" generally, where in profane literature is prophecy to be found? You must accept it, sir, without further proof, that the absence of imagination in the modern constable accounts in a measure for the inferiority of his melancholy.'

My amazement was so great on hearing these extraordinary remarks from a shoe-

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black, that I found myself without a reply for a second or two. At last I said, wishing to draw him out, 'Policemen are too harassed to be melancholy, I suppose.'

'Right, sir,' replied the shoeblack. 'Like most people, they are too busy to be melancholy. The fruity melancholy which a man trod out of any profession or occupation long ago was matured in the cool grotto of his brain to such a crusted mellowness as would have pleased the seasoned palate of old Burton himself, only by the long leisure and daily recurring ease of a time which knew not post-cards, nor railways, nor telegrams; a time when an editor was rarer than a bishop is now, and the printer's devil a harmless imp renowned for his patience. Still, it may be said that a policeman is melancholy, and a postman, and a sandwich-man, and a costermonger; but it is an adust forbidding melancholy. For, as I said before, they are too busy; leisure is impossible to them. Their occupations, with the exception of the costermonger's, are silent, but their thoughts are never free. Their melancholy is to true melancholy what the crab-apple is to the Newtown pippin.'

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‘Where now,’ I asked, ‘will you find anything like the old-fashioned melancholy?’

‘Why, sir,’ replied this amazing shoeblack, ‘if old Burton could take a walk to-day along Oxford Street or the Strand, in search of melancholy, he might for a moment be inclined to stop at the policeman; he might cast a lingering look at the postman; and pause in doubt as there passed a sad procession of sandwich-men, who, having failed to open Pistol’s oyster, the world, are doomed to get in between two shells themselves; he might, old Burton might, give a thought to these. But, sir, he would sit down on the curb, or on a window-ledge, to study every shoeblack he came across. “Here, at last,” he would sigh, “is something like the melancholy of my own time—the melancholy which Fracastorius knew, and which Aretæus perceived to be a perpetual anguish of the soul.” And he would be right. The shoeblack has leisure—daily, hourly leisure. He makes a small but certain living. His work, though artistic in a low degree, requires no thought, and the labour is not excessive; brief periods of idleness alternate with briefer periods of brisk polishing. He has no need to solicit

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custom except by a mechanical gesture. As far as his occupation is concerned, he is a living automaton; and yet every boot planted on his box performs a miracle, for it sets in operation not only a pair of human hands and arms, but brush-makers, and blacking-factories, and carpenters, besides producing the highest of all miracles, faith—faith in the owner of the boot, that his foot will not be stabbed with knives or scalded with vitriol; and faith in the shoeblack, that when the proper shining feat has been performed, a penny will be punctually forthcoming.'

'But this is rather from the subject, you know,' said I.

'Well, it is,' he rejoined. 'But what I want to say is this: the shoeblack has leisure; he knows what on an average he must earn; he has no need to speculate; his thought is free; his imagination roams high and low, gathering from the stars and from the mud amorphous fancies and half-elaborated humours that develop into a dumb melancholy.'

'Ha!' I exclaimed. 'Couldn't you make the shoeblack's melancholy articulate? Couldn't his dull, moist soul be dried and struck like



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a lucifer-match on his own box? Couldn't he blaze out for an instant and illumine a corner of the universe with his actual melancholy?'

Much struck with my metaphor, the shoeblack sat back on the calves of his legs, slapped his brushes together, and said :

'Well, sir, do you recognise in this anything like the shoeblack's melancholy? Of honest animals that work for their living by having their throats cut or their heads knocked in for the use of man, by common consent the pig is considered morally and intellectually to be at least below par. And so, of human beings who earn a livelihood, the lowest in the scale is the shoeblack, although the dustman may be said to run him pretty close for the last place. Yet mud in which he works is earth, and out of earth was made man. Man in a wrong place, like other matter so situated, may be called dirt. The shoeblack dislodges matter wrongly localized, replacing it by matter adjusted to its environment. Government is the shoeblack of society. It displaces rogues, who are, by this image, the mud on the boots of civilization, and, by means of laws, keeps up

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the polish to the best of its ability. There are other shoeblacks besides Government. The clergy, benevolent institutions, etc., endeavour to maintain the polish. Marriage is the block on which the foot of Society rests, and Education the Day and Martin that is rubbed in to the due pitch of lustre. Rightly considered, all business, all organizations—except societies for the performance of three-card tricks of every species—are simply methods to remove dulness and substitute brightness. It matters not, then, whether the penny be paid into a horny, grimy hand or be laid on a consecrated salver: the actual shoeblack performs a service, lower in degree, but of the same nature, as the highest archbishop. Both are servants—ministers—and both at the best can only do their duty. That is something like the shoeblack's melancholy, the perpetual anguish of the soul in which he sees everything through a medium of Day and Martin.'

When the shoeblack had finished his discourse, I noticed that both my boots, although I had not seen the brushes employed upon them, gleamed with a most lustrous polish. I stooped down to examine them

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more closely, and when I raised my head to address the shoeblack again, I could see him nowhere. I waited for several minutes, expecting his return, but he and his box and brushes had vanished like spectres. Determined to seek out the shoeblack on a future occasion, I looked up as I turned into the Strand to note the street in which our conversation had taken place. The name on the wall—Limbo Street—I had never seen before, nor have I seen it since; for when I returned some days later I could find no street at all opening into that part of the Strand.

### ALISON HEPBURN'S EXPLOIT.

ON a night in February, 1880, a tall, un-  
womanly figure, thickly veiled, and  
dressed in ill-fitting black, sped from the  
booking-office to the bookstall, bought a  
cheap edition of Byron, plunged through a  
struggling crowd of passengers and porters,  
and sprang into a third-class carriage, just  
as the guard blew his whistle.

By the time the 10 p.m. train had puffed  
out of the Waverley Station, Edinburgh, the  
late passenger had recovered her breath and  
lifted her veil. The face was that of a young  
woman of not more than nineteen, and was  
remarkable for its dark eyes, widely and  
deeply set in a broad low brow. The mouth,  
nose, and chin had a crude uncarved appear-  
ance, which the yellow light of the carriage  
lamp did nothing to dispel. A small black  
hat sat among a loosely coiled mass of black

## ALISON HEPBURN'S EXPLOIT

hair. The black silk gloves had been darned, and the black dress and jacket were much worn as well as badly made.

The girl glanced carelessly at the other passengers, of whom there were three, and then began to dip into Byron. She turned over the pages, reading a line here and there ; but shortly she laid the book aside, and gave herself up to a furtive study of her companions. Opposite her were two women, with a large hamper on the seat between them. The faces of these women had the raw, florid hue of the porter-drinker ; their eyes bulged and their mouths were loose. Wrapped in cloaks and shawls, their feet tucked up on the seat and pressing either side of the hamper, they had settled themselves in the corners—for the night, apparently. They stared at the girl out of their lustreless, bulging eyes, blinked at the lamp, dozed and stared, and blinked again. On the same side of the compartment as the girl sat the fourth passenger, a sailor, with a big brown beard on a young face. He kept clearing his throat and wetting his lips, as if about to speak ; but whenever his eye caught that of one of the others, he became suddenly

## ALISON HEPBURN'S EXPLOIT

interested in the knotting of a handkerchief which covered a cage he had beside him on the seat.

In the sailor the girl took little interest ; but the women attracted and repelled her. They were clearly *professional* people of some kind. The girl's interest was expressed very frankly in a rapid succession of glances. At last, one of the women, more amused than annoyed, smiled impudently at her. A deep blush dyed the young woman's face immediately ; she picked up her book and pressed back into her corner.

The volume opened at 'The Waltz,' and she read the first lines :

' Muse of the many-twinkling feet ! whose charms  
Are now extended up from legs to arms ;  
Terpsichore !—too long misdeem'd a maid—  
Reproachful term—bestow'd but to upbraid—  
Henceforth in all the bronze of brightness shine,  
The least a vestal of the virgin Nine.  
Far be from thee and thine the name of prude ;  
Mock'd, yet triumphant ; sneer'd at, unsubdued ;  
Thy legs must move to conquer as they fly,  
If but thy coats are reasonably high ;  
Thy breast, if bare enough, requires no shield ;  
Dance forth—*sans armour* thou shalt take the field,  
And own—impregnable to most assaults,  
Thy not too lawfully-begotten waltz.'

## ALISON HEPBURN'S EXPLOIT

A smile of scorn curled her lip as she read. She was thinking how strong it was, and how very superior to Tennyson. Byron is still the poet of the 'teens,' and this young woman was a determined partisan. Although she had read hardly any of Tennyson, she had set up a Poet-Laureate of straw against which she was constantly tilting. She knew Tennyson had been dubbed 'Miss Alfred,' and she relished calling him so with sarcastic emphasis, and a deep satisfaction, as if she had invented the phrase. She closed the book over her finger, and lay back to enjoy the feeling of power transferred to her senses by the lines she had read. To be a rebel, to do and say daring things—that was her ambition. And had she not begun her career in a very signal manner? To run away from home at nineteen, with nothing but a copy of Byron and some biscuits—not even a night-gown in a bag—and no umbrella! It was to beat the record, she thought. In some future school history of literature, admiring and envious girls should read how Alison Hepburn—that was her name—took her life into her own hands in her nineteenth year.

## ALISON HEPBURN'S EXPLOIT

She took from her pocket a dumpy roll of manuscript. Undoing the ribbon with which it was tied, she glanced over the pages to see that they were all there and in their right order ; she also looked lovingly at the small clear writing, and the old English letters of the title-page—‘A Godless Universe, and other Poems, by Alison Hepburn.’ It would make a sensation, she had no doubt of that. There *could* be no difficulty. A publisher would buy the copyright from her for a good sum, or she would have to wait for her fortune until the book had been brought out. She would be quite satisfied with either alternative. Had she not nine pounds in Scotch notes in her bosom ? She blushed a little at the fancy picture of herself setting out to conquer the world, with nothing but biscuits and a copy of Byron. She really could make no claim to be considered a wild romantic person, possessed as she was of a small capital and a valuable manuscript. The blood mounted to her head, and a feeling of security, which even she perceived to be extraordinary, overcame her. She closed her eyes, and, broad awake, dreamt for an hour of a fabulous income from ‘A Godless



## ALISON HEPBURN'S EXPLOIT

Universe'; of marriages with handsome young noblemen; and of unexampled world-wide fame. As her brain cooled, she thought: 'At any rate, I won't fare any worse than Campbell; he got half a crown a line for 'The Pleasures of Hope.' That would make—— I have two thousand five hundred lines. Eight half-crowns to a pound; eights in twenty-five—three. That would make over three hundred pounds. That would keep me for three years; so it's all right.'

She picked up Byron again, for her spirits were falling rapidly, and selected a passage in 'Cain,' which she read with muttering lips.

'Souls who dare use their immortality—  
Souls who dare look the Omnipotent tyrant in  
His everlasting face, and tell him that  
His evil is not good.'

The impulse of these verses, if they can be called so, was enough, in her overwrought condition, to send up the mercury. She laid aside the book, and sat erect, her head poised defiantly.

'Souls who dare use their immortality.'

That's what she was doing. Her brief life came before her, and she seemed to look

## ALISON HEPBURN'S EXPLOIT

down on her past from a high pinnacle. It was all a mystery. How had she come to be born the daughter of a small stationer in a street off Leith Walk? The force that was she might have been Sappho, might have been Mary Queen of Scots. A little dingy house with close, low-ceilinged rooms, and a mixed odour of the wood of lead pencils and the lamp-black of newspapers; the gray stone hill of houses between Leith and Edinburgh, the very special haunt of mist and east wind, and noisy all day and half the night with cars and waggons; a locality and condition upon which even shabby-genteel people looked down—into this, of all environments, she, Alison Hepburn, had been born. It was injurious and insulting. And yet that wasn't half the enormity of her circumstances. Her father was a solemn, rigid Scotch Puritan, sincerely devout, she knew, upright, and of some dignity of character; but on that account all the more unworthy to be her father. For what had he done? He had married a woman unfit to be the mother of anybody. Her face grew dark at this thought. Her mother had been chosen by her father

## ALISON HEPBURN'S EXPLOIT

because of her strength of mind, her managing power, and her religious disposition. Beauty and temperament she had none. She was ill-made, and her bones were disproportionately small. 'Visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children? Yes,' she thought; 'it is iniquitous in a common-looking, commonplace man to marry an ugly, weak-bodied woman. My father believes that the heathen will be damned, even although they have never heard of the Gospel. Well, then, although he had never heard of the proper conditions of marriage, he deserves to be damned for having perpetuated ugliness, ill-shaped bones, and ill-conditioned blood. Oh! I would give every pinch of brain I have to be sweet and beautiful, with rounded, warm-tinted flesh, drawing all men's eyes! But I shall make men adore me for my poetry, or, at least, for the fame and money my poetry shall bring.'

Again she made her calculations, concluding this time with the assurance that, even if she got only one hundred pounds, the price Alexander Smith had received for 'A Life Drama,' she would still be able to overcome the world. A hundred pounds would

## ALISON HEPBURN'S EXPLOIT

give her a year. In that time, and in London, she could write a great poem; and in that time, also, her fame would have spread, and she would receive a very much larger sum for her second venture.

‘And if,’ she thought, as her depression deepened—‘if the publisher will not give me anything, and I have to wait, or if I have difficulty in finding a publisher, I have these nine pounds, which will keep me easily for three months, and during that time I can get an engagement at a theatre.’

Yes, of course, she was forgetting about that, the second string to her bow. Why hadn't she brought her prize for elocution with her? It would be certain to influence a manager. Then her spirits leapt up again, and she went over to herself her two best recitations—Scott's ‘Battle of Flodden’ from ‘Marmion,’ and Aytoun's ‘Death of Montrose.’ With these she electrified herself, and before the excitement caused by them had passed, she fell into a doze.

Something tugging at her dress awakened her. Opening her eyes, and remembering at once where she was, she was amazed to find on the seat beside her, and with two paws

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on her skirt, a white dog, long-nosed and woolly, munching her biscuits. First of all, she picked up her manuscript, fastened it, and replaced it in her pocket. Perhaps it had been looked at while she dozed ; the idea hurt her. She thought *not*, however ; for the other three passengers were all sound asleep.

She felt a little afraid of the dog, who kept a sharp eye on her while he continued eating her biscuits ; but before she could make up her mind how to deal with him, a harsh, sharp cry, very audible even above the clanking of the train, went off in the compartment : ‘ Heave away ! ’

The dog, frightened out of his wits, sprang on to the hamper, and began to whine. Again the shriek was heard, louder and harsher than before, and the dog leapt, yelping, at one of the women, who started up in alarm.

‘ Oh,’ she said, looking about the carriage suspiciously, ‘ it’s only you, is it ? You naughty, naughty Lou-lou ! ’

The woman cuffed the dog, not very severely, and then placed him in the hamper.

‘ I hope,’ she said, with her impudent smile, as she fastened the lid securely, ‘ the dog didn’t frighten you ? ’

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‘ Oh no !’ said Alison, flushing.

‘ Heave away !’

‘ What can that be ?’ exclaimed the woman who had spoken already.

By this time the commotion in the compartment had awakened the other woman and the sailor. The latter, looking very shamefaced, wetted his lips, and said :

‘ I’m very sorry, ladies. It’s only Juggernaut. I meant to tell you that he might start paying out language ; but I couldn’t somehow get the anchor up. Juggernaut’s cut the cable, as it were. I’m not naturally backward, but just come off a two-years’ voyage, and wondering to see ladies. That’s all. Why, ma’am, for four months we never touched port ; and we used to lower a boat in a calm, and pull round to have a look at the figurehead—the Aurora, a fine bust of a woman, but nothing like real flesh and blood.’

‘ Heave away ! Tumble up !’

‘ He’s very angry,’ said the sailor, ‘ at being kept in the dark so long. I thought he might sleep ; but the motion of the train’s new to him, as he never was in one before. He’d better have it out ; so, asking your pardon, here’s Juggernaut.’

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Whisking the handkerchief from the cage, the sailor displayed an Amazon green parrot.

‘I got him in Rio, quite a youngster, and christened him in Calcutta. He christened himself, you may say; for Juggernaut was the first word he said.’

‘Juggernaut! Now, Renzo was no sailor. The cook’s a blooming Chinaman!’ said the parrot.

‘He’s got a lot to say. I think missy had better put her fingers in her ears,’ said the sailor, looking apologetically at Alison.

The girl moved uneasily, but kept her eyes on the parrot, who glared about with an unchanging look of clownish surprise—the stage surprise of the low comedian.

‘Damn her eyes!’ went on the parrot. ‘Splice! Aurora—Auro-ra! Beautiful Juggernaut! Keel-haul the cook! Keel-haul the cook! The cook’s a blooming Chinaman!’

‘He’s going to say all he knows,’ said the sailor, looking again towards Alison. ‘Walnuts wouldn’t stop him.’

Shrieking maledictions, the bird hopped to the lowest bar in its cage. After a few

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moments' silence, it lowered its head, stretched out its neck, and, fixing Alison with one of its astonished eyes, uttered very distinctly a string of oaths, scraps of prayers, and tags of songs. The women laughed, and Alison hid her face behind Byron.

'I'm Juggernaut—beautiful Juggernaut! The cook's a blooming Chinaman!'

Having wound up its oration with these words, the parrot resumed its night-perch, picked three feathers in slow succession from one of its wings, yawned, and disposed itself to sleep.

'He has what you call a vocabulary,' said the sailor, readjusting his handkerchief about the cage. 'Where are we?' he added, as the train began to slacken.

Alison looked out, and saw empty rainy streets shining darkly in the many-shadowed lights of the gas-lamps; below the level of the railway, and also sloping above it, long undulations and precipitous hills of houses wheeled past the slowing train.

'Why, it's Newcastle already!' exclaimed the sailor. 'Well, good-night, asking your pardon for Juggernaut.'

Five minutes after the departure of the



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sailor, the train moved out of the station. Alison thought they were going back to be shunted; but as the speed increased, she imagined that perhaps there had been some mistake.

‘Am I all right for London?’ she asked.

‘All right,’ answered one of the women.

‘We seem to be going back,’ rejoined Alison.

‘We go out of Newcastle as we go in,’ said the woman.

‘Couldn’t we go right through?’ asked Alison.

‘How should I know?’ retorted the woman, tucking herself up in her corner as her companion had already done in hers.

Alison was hurt a little by the rebuff; but one thing pleased her—her fellow-travellers were not in the least concerned and curious about her. She had been apprehensive of inquisitive companions on her journey, and had meant to talk of going to see an aunt and of luggage in the van. It was now evident that there was nothing unusual in her appearance or her mode of travelling, and she took her present experience as a prophecy of exemption from molestation in

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her enterprise. Nevertheless, she felt very wretched. The awkward sailor, the foul-mouthed parrot, the two sordid women grunting and snoring beside her, the cold raw night, and the monotonous rush and jangle of the train, oppressed her like a nightmare. The intolerance with which she regarded everything that disturbed her intense self-preoccupation found vent in scowls and muttered execrations: 'What a beastly train! These dirty old hags!' She closed her eyes tightly, and endeavoured to compel her thoughts into the desired track; but her efforts were in vain, her immediate surroundings having gradually filled her nerves as a coil of wire is charged with electricity. At last she had recourse to Byron. She read here and there feverishly, and then searched out the passage in 'Cain' that had helped her already:

'Souls who dare use their immortality.'

She kept to that line; she struck it over and over as a piano-tuner strikes a note; she twisted and turned its meaning about until it said again the thing she wanted. She was, indeed, daring to use her immor-

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tality. She was immortal—not, she thought, with a curl of her lip, in the old ridiculous sense; *she* carried her immortality in her pocket. This that she had written could never die; it would go sounding on in hearts and brains, echoing through the ages. Being an immortal, she had a right to behave at once as an immortal; therefore she freed herself from parental control, and, a phrase she loved, took her life into her own hands. In thought she had been free for years, and now she must have perfect freedom. She had done, and was now going to London to do more effectually, what she had been sent into the world for: sent by Nature, by something; certainly not by God—oh, not by God in any understanding of the word. Alison Hepburn was rabid with Theophobia, a disease of young minds not uncommon in countries where religious bigotry prevails. She was flying from what was to her a hateful idea of God, represented by strict parents, and by a wretched Sabbath of three long services. She was flying from John Knox. Of her poetry no specimen shall be given; it was written, some in blank verse, some in ballad measure, and some in the manner of the

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rhymed version of the Psalms used in Scotland.

Between Newcastle and Doncaster, Alison's spirits fell far below zero. She began to realize how much she was depending on the immediate receipt of a large sum for her manuscript, and what a forlorn hope it was. She saw that she had been imagining, not believing, herself successful. She thought for the first time of the consternation at home, and for a brief moment realized that she cared a little for her father and mother, and that they loved her. She peered out of the window, but saw on the black screen of night—what she wished to forget. She returned to Byron, but the famous verse was ineffective :

‘Souls who dare use their immortality.’

It was nonsense ; life consisted of an hour, a moment at a time. She read the next line scornfully :

‘Souls who dare look the Omnipotent tyrant in.’

Some of her lines had weak endings, but none so weak as that. Besides, ‘It’s just havers,’ she thought ; ‘because it was only

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when people began to disbelieve in an Omnipotent tyrant that they began to be cheeky to Him.' Was the Venice butcher's wife omnipotent? No; yet she had been Byron's mistress. Were her father and mother omnipotent? No; and yet—her head swam.

Before they arrived at Doncaster her travelling companions, the women with the bulging eyes, produced sandwiches and bottles of stout, and liberated their poodle. Alison ate some of her biscuits and gave some to the dog.

'You mustn't deprive yourself,' said one of the women, offering her a sandwich, which she took.

'Won't you have a drop of stout?' asked the other.

She swallowed half a tumblerful eagerly. It was the first alcoholic liquor she had ever drunk, having been brought up a total abstainer. She found the taste nauseous, but the effect amazed her, and she began to talk.

'I'm running away from home,' she said, with a cheerful smile, persuading herself that she felt nice and comfortable.

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‘We know that, my dear,’ said one of the women.

‘How do you know?’ she asked, startled.

‘Everything about you tells us.’

‘Do girls often run away from home?’

‘Half of them do. We did.’

‘It’s quite common, then,’ said Alison, with an air of disgust.

‘And stupid,’ added one of the women, ‘unless you’re very good-looking. If I’d stayed at home and kept straight, I’d have had a house of my own and a decent shop-keeper for a husband, and ease and plenty. Instead of which——’

She shrugged her shoulders.

‘The Sisters Tomboy with their wonderful poodle Lou-lou,’ said the other. ‘Have some more stout.’

Alison hesitated, but drank off another half-tumblerful.

‘Do you know,’ she said, ‘this is the first intoxicating liquor I have ever tasted? I was made to join a Band of Hope when I was eight, and ever since I was twelve I have wanted to break the pledge, but couldn’t think of going into a public-house. Thank you very much.’

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The Sisters Tomboy grinned at each other and said nothing.

‘I’m going on to London,’ said Alison.

‘We go out at Doncaster.’

Alison stretched herself on the seat, feeling in the humour for a good talk; but while she was still considering how far she might consult the Sisters Tomboy regarding her procedure in London, she fell asleep, and so soundly that the stoppage at Doncaster failed to waken her, although the shock of the train starting again did. She rubbed her eyes. The Sisters Tomboy had gone, and two men were in the carriage. They sat opposite each other, bent forward and absorbed in conversation. One of them was old and heavily built; his eyes were small, gray, and dull; he had a dirty-white beard and moustache; his puffed cheeks and drooping nose were brick-red. She noted his silk hat, brown and rough with age, and broken-brimmed; his frayed and greasy clothes, and thick watch-chain of brass. The other, a younger man, was better dressed: his silk hat was new and glossy; he had sparkling rings on his fingers, and his watch-chain seemed to be of gold. But

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the man himself was uglier even than his companion. His black eyes, protruding and bloodshot, seemed about to blaze up and burst out of his head. His shaved chin, puckered like a many-eyed potato, receded among coarse black whiskers; his nose was swollen and red, his cheeks blotched, and his brow of a sickly white. This loathsome creature had no voice; with swollen veins and continuous restrained gesture he emitted husky, staccato whispers, to which the other replied in soft, oily tones. Neither paid any heed to Alison, but she watched them, fascinated. The sailor, with his parrot, belonged to a world she understood in some degree; so did the Sisters Tomboy; but what were these? From what rookery had these night-birds issued, and on what mission?

At last the two men, having settled the point in dispute, lounged back into their corners. The younger one looked at himself in the window and rubbed his nose fiercely. Suddenly remembering, he sat up, and produced from behind him a half-bottle of port wine; a tumbler; and a white handkerchief in which were wrapped two sponge-cakes. He filled the tumbler, and handed



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it with one of the cakes to his companion, who drank off the wine slowly, but without a pause. The younger man took the rest of the wine; then both ate their sponge-cakes. There was no pledging each other; nothing at all was said about what they were doing; some common object preoccupied them intensely.

When the sponge-cakes were finished, the younger man took from his pocket a flat bottle containing whisky. This having been emptied, the tumbler and both bottles were flung out of the window, and the conversation resumed. The two men talked all the way to York, the elder rolling out long sentences, soft and oily, the younger growing huskier in his whispers, and less restrained in gesture. Alison could not make out a single word, but she watched them, hardly conscious of thought or feeling. As the train stopped at York Station both men became silent, and the younger stared at Alison.

‘By God!’ she heard him croak in the lessening noise of the slowing train, ‘she’s uglier awake than asleep.’

‘So much the better for her,’ said the other.

She wondered vaguely for a moment if

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she had been the subject of their whole conversation. But that was impossible, for both resumed their look of intense pre-occupation the moment they had uttered their rude remarks, and before the train stopped they jumped out and walked away quickly in a purposeful manner.

All the way from Doncaster to York these men had seemed like a hideous vision, utterly unreal and impossible. At the last moment, in their entire loathsomeness and brutality, they had trampled straight across her heart; and they had done it with the utmost indifference, as she herself in a preoccupied mood might crush a worm visible in her path, but unperceived by her inner sense. She had often told herself she was plain, but nobody had ever called her ugly before. She had understood the absence of comment—or had she not? Perhaps people would have talked to her of her appearance had she been only plain-looking. Had she heard the truth for the first time? Was she ugly?

She began to pace the compartment, impatient till the train should start. There was suspense in the stoppage—an added misery. The guard, passing, saw her.

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‘Twenty minutes here,’ he said, opening the door.

‘Oh!’ she exclaimed, and got out.

She was very stiff and very cold, and walked about the platform to warm herself. She thought how comfortable a bed is—to lie down secure, with no concern for the morrow, in her father’s house. She walked more quickly; she ran as if to escape her thoughts. She searched about for a clock. A few minutes to four! How had her father and mother spent the night?

The platform was almost deserted. One or two groups of men in caps and heavy overcoats stood at the doors of smoking compartments. Where had the passengers gone to? To her surprise, never having travelled at night before, she saw that the refreshment-room was open. She went in and drank some coffee. There were over a score of people eating and drinking at the bar. The rattle of cups and saucers, the steaming tea and coffee, the sharp orders, chatter, an occasional spluttering laugh, and the bright light, soothed her, and then made her heart ache again. She remained in the refreshment-room until a porter announced

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that the train was on the point of departure. In the rush, she made up her mind to get into a compartment with some cheerful people if she could; but her heart failed her as she ran along the platform, and saw the others jumping in among their snug wraps, newspapers, books, open bags—the encampments of expert travellers. She got into an empty compartment, probably—she couldn't be sure—the one she had left; and from York to Grantham, from Grantham to Peterborough, she had it to herself.

Her dream was ended—her mad folly had run its course; but the train went on. The rattling glass in either end of the compartment reflected her ugly, haggard face. She felt as if the universe were one immense block of adamant, through which the train was gnawing and drilling a way for itself like a fierce, instinctive worm. Half choked, she let down one of the sashes, and looked out. The cold wind rushed at her throat; but the world was there still—a drifting blackness above, a rushing blackness below, the lower blackness branded blacker in spots and stripes where trees and hedges clustered and stretched. She leaned out of the window

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until she was chilled to the bone ; then she raised the sash, and lay down on the seat with her back to the engine.

‘By God ! she’s uglier awake than asleep.’

‘So much the better for her.’

These words kept burning into her brain. Plain she had guessed herself to be, but with wonderful eyes and an irresistible expression when she chose ; and then her cloud of hair, on which she could sit ! She rose up, tore off her hat, uncoiled her hair, shook it about her shoulders, and looked in the window ; looked her sweetest, smiled—her teeth were good—and said soft nothings to an imaginary lover. She coiled and uncoiled her hair, pressed her face to the window to stare into the depths of her eyes, started back at arm’s length—to the middle of the compartment, to the opposite end—and looked at herself from every point of view and possible distance. She was angular, pale, and her features were very irregular ; but surely she was not ugly ! She assured herself that, over certain temperaments, she was bound to exercise an irresistible fascination. She recited, she sang, she danced ; she grew warm, her courage rose, and she laughed aloud. Hastily doing

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up her hair, and putting on her hat again, she picked up Byron, and sat down in the middle of one seat with her feet on the other. She read a piece of 'Manfred,' a piece of 'Childe Harold,' a piece of 'Don Juan,' but without pleasure, without a transference of energy. She grew drowsy, and had to close the book. Soon, however, as she shut her eyes and tried to sleep, her fancy was on the alert. She saw her father's stern but not unkindly face; and her mother's, worn and deeply lined, with all the hardness gone out of it. That was unendurable. She sat up again. She stamped up and down the compartment to keep herself warm. She set her teeth; she grew dogged. The train was going on; *she* must go on. She would find a publisher; she would go on the stage; she would make money; she would grow famous, and have men at her feet. The blood mounted to her head, and the dream of success held her again, although with no firm grip, till the train stopped at Grantham. As soon as it resumed its journey, the memory of her last travelling companions returned.

'By God! she's uglier awake than asleep.'

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‘ So much the better for her.’

All the way to Peterborough, her sense of her own lack of physical charm filled her with dull pain. Why was she not beautiful, with rich blood and a gracious body? Why was she not as beautiful as she often felt—as she always felt in the presence of beautiful things, visible or heard: paintings, or sunsets, or music, or the sound of waters? Wrath possessed her again; her father and mother, and all the unlovely circumstances of her life, were severally indicted and condemned.

Day had broken for some time before she took note of it. Veils and scraps of mist hung about the leafless woods; rags and tufts had caught in the hedges, and widths and stretches of it lay on the fields like immense webs wringing wet, and spread out to bleach. The gray dawn, labouring with clouds and the stubborn wintry night, got into the sky by stealth. Her compartment appeared like a world within a world, lit by the ghastly twilight of the yellow gas-lamp and the dull beams of morning. Sick with cold, hunger, and discomfort, and exhausted by an emotional conflict of nearly eight hours, she felt her spirits, like the yellow gas-lamp,

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grow pale in the new day. She suffered passively for a time, till her misery became unbearable. Then she let down one of the sashes, and flung Byron out of the window. The relief this action brought was of short duration ; but while she was still fingering her manuscript in her pocket with thoughts of tearing it up, the train stopped at Peterborough. A countryman and some business men came into the compartment beside her. They seemed to her to bring with them a pleasant odour of breakfast, of cheerful parlours, and warm kitchens, where the ruddy firelight shone on gleaming dish-covers. She thought of breakfast at home—hot rolls and the fragrance of coffee in the sitting-room ; hot-pressed newspapers in the shop. She shuddered, and shut her eyes tight. For several minutes she sat quivering like a creature bound and gagged, and in the grip of some torture engine. At last, quite worn out, she fell into a half-doze, half-swoon, which continued until the ticket-collector aroused her at Finsbury Park.

‘ Is this London ? ’ she said.

‘ Yes,’ replied the collector.

‘ Do I get out here, then ? ’



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‘What part of London do you want?’

‘Does the train go on?’

‘Yes; to the terminus.’

‘Ah, yes, the terminus. I’ll go to the terminus.’

In her abject state the mere word ‘terminus’ did her good. Here was something that had an end. Probably, if the means had been to her hand when she stepped out of the train at King’s Cross, she would have killed herself.

There were not very many passengers. Two or three of these were met by friends, and formed little glowing knots, with hearty hand-shakings and kisses. Bustle about luggage, the getting into cabs, and the giving of addresses, had never before seemed to Alison significant of anything except the pettiness of life. Now her feeling was that no possible detail of interest that attaches one to life can be petty. She saw a well-dressed girl, not much older than herself, step into a hansom, and tip the porter who handed up her portmanteau and told the driver where to go. To possess luggage and to drive to an address was to be acquainted, and to have affairs of business or pleasure.

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She, Alison Hepburn, was utterly alone, the victim of a mad dream that had swallowed her and cast her up again, a half-digested morsel. Her soul would bear the marks of the eating acid for ever. It was clear to her as she stood, forlorn and shivering, on the platform at King's Cross, that there were hardly a dozen passable lines in her whole manuscript. A crimson flame lit her face as she thought of her confident expectations a few hours back—if not at the rate of Campbell's 'Pleasures of Hope,' then surely at the rate of Smith's 'Life Drama!' She walked quickly down the platform, pulling her nine greasy Scotch notes out of her bodice; but she did not leave the station.

It was one of the most dismal parts of London on which she looked out—the junction of Euston Road, Gray's Inn Road, Pentonville Road, and York Road—and there was a fog. Two men looked out with her; they were about to separate, and they spoke for a minute.

'Then, you'll have that stuff ready for me by half-past twelve?' said one, who was tall, well dressed, and well looking, and who spoke very pleasantly.

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‘Yes,’ said the other, short, shabby, husky; ‘between that and one.’

‘Oh, I must have it by one. You must bring it to me not later than twelve-fifty.’

‘That’s impossible,’ said the other doggedly. ‘Send or come at half-past twelve. If it’s ready then, you’ll have it. If not, you or your messenger must wait.’

‘Where will you be?’

‘I’ll be in the Manuscript Room.’

‘Very well.’

‘What a beastly fog!’

‘I always like a fog,’ said the well-dressed man.

‘Manuscript Room.’

‘Manuscript Room.’

She knew she had overheard the talk of two men in some literary by-path—some lion and his jackal. The jackal stepped into a green ’bus that drifted into sight and was gone; for during the few seconds she had stood at the exit of the station the fog had become a dense sooty cloud. She had been aware of a tumult of busses, cars, waggons, and cabs, and had noticed the four cross-roads when she first looked out. Now

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she felt as if she were occupying a hole in an immense dripping, dirty sponge. Some yellow dregs of light were suspended in the filthy moisture, and there was a muffled sound in her ears. She looked after the lion, who had returned into the station. He went to the cab-rank, walking with such ease and firmness, she thought. She had not seen the kind of man before—not among the Edinburgh lawyers, or the actors, whom she had watched at the theatre doors; not in Princes Street, and not at Aberdour in the summer holidays. He looked to her a high creature from a different sphere. She saw his face distinctly, in spite of the fog, when the cab passed out of the station, for she bent forward and stared. He noticed her, and looked back, with a mixed expression of surprise and amusement, a touch of scorn, an affectation of indifference. It was a quaint, wild face he saw; pale, begrimed; glaring, fiery-eyed, out of a tangle of black hair. She saw a strong chin, a small firm mouth, a straight nose, and black-blue eyes; she saw yellow hair and a smooth fair face, and she hungered for them.

As soon as the fog had engulfed the cab,

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she replaced seven of her notes in her bosom, and turned back into the station. A porter directed her to the booking-office.

‘When is there a train for Edinburgh?’ she asked of the clerk.

‘In five minutes.’

‘Oh! Give me a third single, then.’

She laid down the two notes she had in her hand, and the clerk paused in the act of stamping the ticket. He picked up the notes, and held them close to the gas. She wondered what was to happen. Was she to be arrested for something?

‘These are only worth nineteen and sixpence here,’ he said.

‘Oh! I’ll give you another, then,’ she rejoined, relieved, and not thinking what she was saying.

‘You don’t need. Instead of thirty-two and eightpence, it will cost you thirty-three and eightpence, as it were.’

‘I see,’ she said.

When she had received the ticket and her change, she walked about the departure platform in an aimless way. The porter who had shown her to the booking-office, having heard her destination, said to her :

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‘ Beg pardon, lady, but you’ll miss your train if you don’t mind.’

‘ Oh, where is it ?’

‘ This,’ he said, opening a third-class carriage at her side.

She gave the porter half a crown and went in. Hardly had she seated herself, when the train started.

Her journey back to Edinburgh was one long blank misery, with here and there a vivid flash of pain. Worn out with excitement, and weak with cold and lack of food and lack of sleep, she sat motionless in a corner of the compartment. Passengers came and went at the various stations. Sometimes she was alone, sometimes the compartment was full; it was all alike to her. She slept no part of the way, but a kind of trance held her, in which she was conscious only of defeat and self-contempt, except at intervals, when she heard inhuman voices say, ‘ By God! she’s uglier awake than asleep!’ ‘ So much the better for her’; when she thought of her father and mother; when the face of the lion mocked her out of the fog; or when she turned and stung herself with the taunt that her flight was a piece

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of mad folly, because she was weak and ugly—beauty and strength would have gone on undismayed. Her mind had been so fully occupied, and her thoughts had wandered so far back and so far forward during the up-journey, that on arriving at London it had seemed as if she had been travelling for weeks. But at the end of the way back, when she heard one of the passengers say, 'Yes, this is Edinburgh,' she could scarcely believe her ears. Physically and mentally exhausted, for her the hours and the miles had slipped past like minutes and footsteps, uncounted and unnoted.

She came out at the Haymarket instead of going on to the Waverley Station, because the former was further from her home. She had determined suddenly that her brother and sister ought to be asleep before she returned, and it was still nearly two hours to their bed-time. At the Haymarket Station she was half an hour from home, and so that disposed of a quarter of the time she had to wait.

She took a seat on a bench on the platform. Her mind was a blank—numb, like a bloodless finger. After a few minutes she

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went to the refreshment-room, hardly knowing what she was doing, and drank some tea. As she had eaten very little for twenty-four hours, the tea, inferior station infusion as it was, had a powerful effect. Her nerves grew tense at once; she felt light-headed, and went out into the street like one walking on air, as the saying is. The raw east wind was grateful to her senses; it smelt of home, and carried also the fragrance of the romantic dreams and high thoughts she had been accustomed to weave as she walked in the windy evenings. Breathing hard and stepping quickly, she soon reached the west end of Princes Street. The mass of the Castle and the Castle rock, faintly but firmly outlined against the night sky, like a piece of ancient darkness that had grown solid and taken shape, seemed about to overwhelm her. Her eye wavered along the ridge of the High Street; the tall dark houses trembled and grew steady; ghostly lights flickered up behind them from shop-windows and lurked about the shadowy crown of St. Giles. Then she remembered Jenny Macintosh for the first time during her unfortunate exploit. Near the top of one



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of these high houses Jenny Macintosh lived alone in one little room, and three or four times a week, often every night in the week, Alison was in the habit of visiting her.

This Jenny Macintosh was an old woman near her hundredth year, and belonged to a type now almost extinct. Her stepmother had sent her from home to be a cowgirl in her eighth year. After a number of years in the country she had come to Edinburgh as a domestic servant, and had in course of time married, borne children, and been left a childless widow. At sixty she had had to begin the world over again. Tireless and honest, she obtained plenty of work as a charwoman, and it was in that capacity that she became associated with the Hepburns. She had worked for Mr. Hepburn's mother, and when he married she stepped into the position of what is now called a mother's help. From her seventy-fifth to her eighty-second year she had cleaned several offices before nine every morning, and had then gone for the rest of the day to assist Mrs. Hepburn with her children, always retaining a room of her own in the High Street. In her eighty-second year she was

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disabled by an accident to her arm, and inquiries having been made about her in hospital, and her great age discovered, a small pension from an old bequest had been settled on her for the rest of her life.

In the parish school and in the communicants' class, Jenny, although scarcely able to read, had learned by heart the Shorter Catechism, several passages of Scripture, and the Psalms in the rhymed version used in Scotland. Thus equipped, she had faced unflinchingly her long hard battle. One of her chief delights had been, and still was, to repeat the questions, or 'carritches.' She had employed them as lullabies, and had found them peculiarly efficacious in quieting Alison; and now Alison still came to hear her say them. It was not conscious affection that had led Alison to call regularly on her old nurse; the visit to Jenny, a valid reason with her parents, enabled her to go out every night if she chose; there was always the walk through the crowded streets, up Leith Walk and over the North Bridge, and sometimes she went aside along Princes Street.

With the remembrance of Jenny Macin-

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tosh, Alison became at once, and for the first time, acutely sensible of what she had done ; she had cut all the cords that bound her to her past life. That these could be reunited and the wound healed, she hoped—she knew, indeed ; but the severance had taken place.

In a moment it flashed on her that perhaps Jenny Macintosh knew nothing about her exploit. She breathed a little more freely. She had paid her regular visit to Jenny the night before at eight ; had reached home again about nine ; had found at half-past nine when she went to set the supper—she had planned it so—that there was no butter in the house, and, going out professedly to buy some, had taken the train to London. Had she not returned from Jenny's, her father or her mother would, doubtless, have gone there at once ; as it was, possibly neither of them had gone. She would begin, then, in the High Street ; or, rather, she hoped to find that there was no need to begin again with Jenny—at least, so far as Jenny was concerned.

She found the old charwoman sitting as usual in a low arm-chair beside the fire,

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dressed in her gray wincey gown and blue checked apron, with a white cap, or 'mutch,' on her head. She was now a very small woman. Her left arm, the disabled one, rested on a Bible and a Shorter Catechism lying on her lap, and with her right hand she kept polishing the arm of her chair. As for her face, it consisted of wrinkles, a large Roman nose, and sharp blue eyes. The furniture in her room comprised a chest of drawers, a bed, a trunk, a shelf with dishes, a cupboard, a table, and three chairs. A faded carpet covered the floor. There was nothing in the shape of a picture to be seen, and no ornament anywhere. In the centre of the stone mantelpiece stood a candlestick; at one end was a salt-box, at the other a wooden bowl containing some coppers.

As Alison entered the little room, she felt very safe; she had come out of a wild enchanted land of storms and spectres into an accustomed quiet place.

'Is that you, Elison?' said Jenny, looking round with her sharp blue eyes that saw very little.

'Yes, Jenny,' replied Alison tranquilly. 'How are you to-night?'

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‘Juist aboot it. Yer faither was here this mornin’. I couldna mak’ oot juist what he wantit. He seem’t concerned aboot ye, lassie. He speired if ye aye cam’ here still. What for wad he be thinkin’ ye gaed other gates, noo?’

‘I’m sure I don’t know,’ said Alison.

‘Ye’re sune the nicht, lassie,’ said Jenny, after a pause.

‘Ay,’ said Alison. ‘How’s your rheumatism, Jenny?’

‘Juist aboot it. But I dinna compleen. It’s a’ tae remind me that I didna come here tae bide, though I think sometimes the boatman’s forgotten me. We’ll hae the carritches noo.’

The old woman handed Alison the Shorter Catechism.

‘Where did we leave off?’ asked Alison.

‘The twentieth carritch—the estate of sin and misery.’

“Who is the Redeemer of God’s elect?”

Jenny clasped her hands, closed her eyes, and gave the answer. She spoke correctly, except for some vowels; very slowly, very reverently, and in a kind of rhythm, to which she kept time with sweeping inclinations of her whole body.

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“ ‘The onnly Redeemer of Goad’s elect is the Loard Jesus Christ, who, being the Eternal Son of Goad, became man, and so was, and continueth to be, Goad and man in two distinct natures and waun person for iver.’ ”

“ ‘How did Christ, being the Son of God, become man?’ ”

This, the twenty-second ‘carritch,’ was a special favourite of Jenny’s. She became excited; her whole body trembled, her voice rose, and she delivered the answer triumphantly in a passion of belief and wonder.

“ ‘Christ, the Son of Goad, became man by taking to Himself a true body and a reasonable soul, being conceived—by the power—of the Holy Ghost—in the woamb—of the Virgin Mary—and born of her, yet—without—sin!’ ”

Alison went on mechanically:

“ ‘What offices doth Christ——’ ”

‘Bide a wee!’ cried Jenny, still shaking with excitement. ‘Aye! Umphumph! Marvellous! How excellent in all the earth, Loard, our Loard, is Thy name! Bide a wee!’ she repeated, when Alison was about to resume. After a minute, Jenny said:

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‘That’ll dae for carritches. Read the fourteenth o’ John.’

Alison took the Bible from Jenny’s knee, and replaced the Catechism.

“Let not your heart be troubled,” she read. “Ye believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.”

‘Ay!’ said Jenny. ‘That was written for me—even for me. Ye needna read ony mair.’

‘Good-night, then, Jenny,’ said Alison.

‘Gude-nicht. Ye’ll be lookin’ in the morn’s nicht?’

‘Maybe.’

‘If we’re spar’t. Gude-nicht.’

Without either kiss or clasp Alison came and went. Jenny, indeed, would have misunderstood any show of affection; the common hand-shake itself was employed by her only on very rare occasions.

Mechanically, Alison turned towards home on leaving Jenny’s. She recognised at once

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that she was obeying a habit, and that she would be home sooner than she had intended if she went in the direction her steps had chosen. Nevertheless, she let herself go. She had come back to the native ground from which she had wrenched herself; one fibre had taken root again at once, and the others were stretching instinctively towards their old grooves. Yet when she arrived at the street in which she lived, her first impulse was to turn and run. The light from her father's shop streamed across the dreary way; the shop was always open late, as penny packets of paper and envelopes were required by the people in the neighbourhood till after ten o'clock. She saw the school-bags hanging at the door, and the tissue-paper chimney ornaments in the window. It was this mean life she had run away from, and to it she was returning, a convicted fool and coward. Leaning against a lamp-post, she began to defend herself. The long, cold, miserable railway journey was the cause of her defeat. If London were an hour away, and she could have started in the morning! But this was no preparation for what she was about to do. She would not be irresolute now. Lifting



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her dress, she ran along the street and into the shop.

Her father, who was arranging some new goods on his shelves, knew at once, although his back was to the door, that his daughter had come back. He turned round slowly; his face was white, and working; his large dark eyes lightened and clouded with emotion.

‘Well, Alison?’ he said, in a judicial tone, through which a tremor shot.

‘I’ve been very bad,’ said Alison sheepishly.

Mr. Hepburn finished what he had been about. Alison clasped and unclasped her hands, and then pulled off her gloves as if they had been burning her.

‘You had better go to your mother,’ said Mr. Hepburn.

Alison passed through the shop into the parlour, where her mother was sewing.

‘Oh!’ cried Mrs. Hepburn, rising. ‘Where have you been?’

‘Nowhere,’ replied Alison. ‘In a train. I went to London, and came back.’

‘London!’ said Mrs. Hepburn, sitting again.

Mrs. Hepburn was older-looking than her

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years—a tall, scraggy woman, with a sallow complexion. Alison had inherited her broad brow and wide, deep-set eyes, but the facial resemblance ended there; the daughter's irregular features were in marked contrast with Mrs. Hepburn's straight nose and large, firm mouth and chin.

The parlour, a small square room with a moderately high ceiling, was lit by a single gas jet from a chimney bracket. On the walls were several illuminated texts, and two engravings—one of the Royal Family, the other a bird's-eye view of Edinburgh. The furniture consisted of a Pembroke table, chairs, and a sofa of mahogany upholstered in horsehair, a small glazed bookcase, and a cheap inlaid whatnot.

'Are you tired? You must be tired,' said Mrs. Hepburn. 'You'd better go to bed.'

Alison stood still, staring at her mother, who had resumed her sewing.

'Where are Tom and Katey?' she asked at length.

'In bed. I sent them sooner than usual.'

'I am tired,' said Alison. 'Good-night.'

'Good-night,' said her mother.

Alison went upstairs to her room, placed

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her pound notes in a drawer, washed her hands and face, undressed quickly, and lay down. She had never in her life before felt so completely at rest ; and the repose of her mind was rather deepened than disturbed by a vague wonder.

Before she fell asleep her mother came in and lit the gas. She had brought a tray, with tea and bread-and-butter.

‘ You must be hungry, Alison,’ she said. ‘ Sit up and take this.’

Alison obeyed. While she ate, her mother, in a nervous manner, lifted and laid things on the mantelshelf and the toilet-table. Then she made an orderly disposition of the clothes which Alison had thrown off in a heap, and this actual employment restored in a measure her self-control.

When Alison had finished, Mrs. Hepburn took the tray, and said, with a return of her nervous manner :

‘ Where did you get the money, Alison ?’

‘ It was my own money,’ said Alison ; ‘ I saved it from the wages father gives me. It took me three years to save it.’

‘ I see,’ rejoined Mrs. Hepburn, trying to hide her relief.

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She tucked in the bed-clothes, seemed about to speak again, but said only 'Good-night.' Then she put out the gas, and pulled open the door, which had been ajar. Instead of leaving the room, however, she stood suddenly stock still. Alison heard her give up the tray, and come back to her bedside.

'Alison,' she said, whispering, 'were you alone?'

'Quite alone.'

'Well, good-night again.'

Mrs. Hepburn raised her voice, but not loud enough to prevent her daughter from hearing a deep long-drawn sigh at the door.

The most prominent among the ideas that came dimly before Alison's mind as she fell asleep was a sense of power acquired over her father and mother by her exploit. She had expected to be at their mercy, but found herself, in a way, mistress of the situation.

In the morning her mother advised her not to rise until her brother and sister had gone to school. She had breakfast in bed, and then slept again for two hours. At eleven she rose and went to the parlour,

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where her father awaited her. Mrs. Hepburn attended to the shop that forenoon.

Alison blushed fiery red as she entered the parlour, for on the table lay her manuscript.

‘I have been glancing through this,’ said Mr. Hepburn, lifting and dropping ‘A Godless Universe.’ ‘I’m no great judge of poetry, but some of it seems not badly written. I think it’s nonsense, of course, too nonsensical to be blasphemous. Was it this took you to London, Alison?’

‘Yes.’

A subtle smile softened Mr. Hepburn’s face and flickered about the corners of his dark eyes.

‘You had plenty of money with you, your mother tells me. Why did you come back?’

Alison said nothing.

‘I believe it was really at bottom some affection for your father and mother that brought you back. Was it, Alison?’

‘Yes, yes,’ replied Alison, conscious of an attempt to appear more deeply stirred than she was.

‘Well, what do you want to do?’ asked her father, an anxious look coming into his face.

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‘I want to write ; I feel that I have something to say.’

‘How can you have anything to say? You’re only a lassie yet.’

‘Well, then, I have a need to say something.’

‘Yes ; but how are you going to live ? If you leave the shop, I shall have to hire an assistant, and shall have nothing to give you.’

‘I’ll stay in the shop,’ said Alison, ‘though I hate it.’

‘I hate it, too. I may tell you, Alison, that it was just such restlessness as is now appearing in you that stranded me here. I know how difficult it is to learn from the experience of others ; but it is as sure as you are sitting there, that if you don’t stick to the shop your life will be one of misery. That I can foresee.’

‘What did you want to be, father ?’ asked Alison, forgetting herself in the new light thrown on her father’s character.

‘I shall tell you of my foolish days. My father wished me to be a lawyer, and I studied law for several years. When he died, I persuaded my mother to enter me for

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the Church ; then I shifted to medicine ; then I wished to be a medical missionary ; but, instead of studying, I wasted my time at revival meetings. I spent about eight years at the University altogether, eating up my father's savings. My mother had carried on my father's business—a very good stationery and fancy business in Princes Street—but her employés cheated her, and we were bankrupt before I had acquired even the rudiments of a profession. It was then we came here, and it was then I learned that religion is more than sentiment, that without works faith is a mere prurience, that love for God without duty to God is an illicit love.' Here Mr. Hepburn, whose speech had grown fervid, paused abruptly. ' In the circumstances,' he said, resuming, ' it is odd that I should be explaining myself to you. I am afraid you have a very hard heart, Alison. But I shall never urge religion upon you. Well, then, my lass, are you quite prepared to go on as before ?'

' Yes,' said Alison, as heartily as she could. ' Oh, father !' she exclaimed, suddenly understanding, although scarcely feeling at all, how gentle he was with her.

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She had never really had a talk with her father before. His hard life had made him outwardly stern, and his children shunned him.

‘I hope,’ he said, laying his hand on his daughter’s head, as he left the room, ‘this will work for good to us all.’

It was said and done conventionally, and spoilt entirely the effect of the interview.

When her father had gone, Alison picked up her manuscript and turned to her favourite pieces.

‘I’m damned if they aren’t good,’ she said hotly.

She put some dozen pages in her pocket and thrust the rest in the fire. She then went to the bookcase to select a book, but her mother entered from the shop.

‘Now, Alison,’ Mrs. Hepburn said, ‘I hope you are going to do what your father wants. He is very stern-like. You’ve not been thwarting him?’

‘Oh no!’

‘You’ll be wise not to. You’ll find it impossible to live at loggerheads with your father, his sense of duty is so strong. If you please him, you may be certain you are



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doing what's right, Alison. Go into the shop and see if he wants you. I must look after the dinner.'

'Oh!' said Mr. Hepburn when his daughter appeared. 'I forgot to say to you to try and be more agreeable with your mother—more of a help to her. Your mother has a very strong sense of duty, and you may think her exacting sometimes, but she will never ask you to do what you can't or oughtn't to do.'

'A strong sense of whose duty?' asked Alison. 'And what is duty?'

'These are childish questions, Alison,' said her father.

But Alison grinned, thinking what simple, grotesque people her father and mother were. What had duty to do with shop-keeping, and cooking and the making of beds? All those things, and all other things, became so utterly insignificant when she put the question: Could it ever have been anybody's duty to bring into the world such an ugly, ill-conditioned creature as Alison Hepburn? She picked up a toy hand-mirror and looked at herself in it, and then at her father. Mr. Hepburn, half divining something dreadful in her mind, left the shop quickly.

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Shortly after, Tom and Kate came home from school for dinner. They had clearly been cautioned about their first meeting with Alison, for they looked very conscious when they saw her. Tom, a lanky, ill-thriven boy of twelve, turned round as he was about to pass into the parlour, and stuck his tongue in his cheek. Kate, a lanky, ill-thriven girl of ten, blushed and looked sideways at her sister.

Alison kept the shop while the rest were at dinner. She sold some copy-books, some pencils, some note-paper, and thought how wretched it was to be depending for a livelihood on such petty wants. How ineffably weak and foolish she had been to come back! She said nothing to Tom and Kate when they passed through the shop again on their return to school; and they, quarrelling hotly about a piece of slate-pencil, gave their sister neither word nor look.

After dinner she read listlessly in several books. In the evening she visited Jenny Macintosh, and walked along Princes Street eating her heart out. She was so utterly unequipped for the battle of life that there could never be any need for her to choose

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between shame and starvation. For a moment she envied the furred and scented women she passed.

‘By God! she’s uglier awake than asleep.’

‘So much the better for her.’

If somebody would only put an iron mask on her and shut her up in a cage! If——

‘Oh, Miss Hepburn! How do you do?’

It was James Williamson, the son of a wholesale stationer, with whom her father dealt. The Williamsons were members of the same church as the Hepburns. James, a loutish, red-haired lad of twenty, travelled for his father; an adept at business, he was regarded by his friends and by himself as a social failure. Alison flushed when he stopped her; he and his attentions had not once crossed her memory during her journey. She never had thought of him at all. He had been to her a mere detail common to the nuisances of business and church-going, an odd creature who generally succeeded in shaking hands with her on Sunday in a bashful, surprised way, turning up in unexpected corners with his ‘Oh, Miss Hepburn! How do you do?’ It occurred to her for the first time that this man was

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wooing her, that here was a lover! She remembered in the instant of shaking hands how his business visits were generally paid in the evening when her father was at tea, and she alone behind the counter; and how he never would hear of her summoning her father, but stood looking at her and trying to talk until Mr. Hepburn returned to the shop.

She gave him her hand and burst out laughing; it was such an odd sensation. Here was a man who desired her, wanted her, thought he needed her. She laughed again.

‘Oh,’ said young Williamson, much disconcerted, ‘I see you’re quite well! I thought you weren’t. Good-bye.’

‘But why did you think I was ill?’ asked Alison, becoming serious.

‘You looked so white.’

Alison said nothing. She was wondering what attraction she could have for this stupid red-headed fellow.

‘Well, good-bye,’ he said.

‘Won’t you walk back with me?’ she asked.

James rubbed his hands, and stared.

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Then, with a gurgling laugh, he placed himself at her side, and assumed the position of escort in a very self-conscious manner.

They walked on in silence for several minutes.

'I say,' said James, after clearing his throat repeatedly, 'what a good reciter you are!'

'Do you think so?'

'Yes, you do it splendid. But you're awfully clever.'

'How do you know I'm clever.'

'Everybody says you are.'

'Everybody!'

'In the church, you know.'

'What else do they say about me?'

James looked askance at her.

'Then, they do say other things about me. Tell me.'

'Well—mind you, it's only what they say.'

'Of course.'

'Well, you're conceited and stuck-up.'

'And what do you think?'

'Me!'

'Yes.'

'Oh, I don't mind if you are.'

'Do you think me conceited and stuck-up?'

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‘I can’t express myself. You know I’m not clever. It’s like this: I would like you to be conceited and stuck-up, but not—with me.’

James, alarmed at what he had said, moved a little away, and fell half a step behind; but Alison turned towards him, laughing, and he pulled himself together immediately.

‘Do you read much?’ asked Alison.

‘I haven’t time, and I don’t care for it. I suppose you’re an awful reader.’

‘I haven’t time, either, but I read as much as I can.’

‘Shakespeare and Scott and Carlyle, and all those old buffers, I suppose?’

‘I don’t care much for Scott. He’s no psychologist.’

‘Ah!’ exclaimed James admiringly. ‘Who’s your favourite poet?’

‘Byron, I think.’

‘Ah! Byron! Ay. I say, do you know I’m going into partnership in a month?’

‘With your father?’

‘Yes. I’ll have two hundred and fifty per ann.’

He watched her closely out of the tail of

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his eye to note the effect of this announcement; but it was not visible, which was disappointing. If he had no learning, he was about to have an income; and that was something to set off against the reading of Byron.

‘I suppose a man can live on two hundred and fifty a year?’ said Alison.

‘Rather! Why, a man can marry on two hundred and fifty a year!’

‘Into misery,’ said Alison, looking him square in the face.

‘Misery!’ he exclaimed, standing still abruptly, while she half halted and moved on more slowly. ‘But do you know what you’re saying?’ he cried, getting into line again. ‘Plenty of people marry on a hundred.’

‘I don’t call that marriage.’

‘Oh, you don’t call it marriage?’ he said, not knowing whether to be perplexed or amused. ‘What would you call marriage, now?’

‘I don’t know. Are you coming in?’

They had arrived at the shop.

‘May I?’ he said eagerly. ‘Do you think I should?’

‘Father will be glad to see you.’

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‘ I’ve no business, you know.’

‘ Never mind.’

Mr. Hepburn, surprised but not ill pleased, shook hands cordially, and asked the young man to go into the parlour. There the table was set for supper, and Mrs. Hepburn was busy at the fire.

‘ This is a surprise !’ she said.

‘ Oh !’ said James. ‘ I was coming down, at any rate, and met Miss Hepburn on the way.’

‘ Well, you’ll stay and have a bite of supper now you’re here ?’

‘ Oh, thank you !’

‘ We’re very homely people, you know,’ continued Mrs. Hepburn. ‘ But you won’t object to take pot-luck. We have no servant, so we let the kitchen fire out after tea, and if there’s any supper to cook, do it here.’

‘ And a very good plan, too,’ said James, beside himself with delight at the cordiality of his reception.

Alison began to assist her mother, but Mrs. Hepburn declined her help.

‘ Show Mr. Williamson the album,’ she said.

Seated together on the sofa, they looked



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over the album, holding it between them. Young Mr. Williamson's eager interest in every photograph of which Alison chose to speak was very marked. Mrs. Hepburn noticed it, and cast an intelligent glance at the couple.

'Oh, this is yourself, Miss Hepburn!' cried James, seizing the album, and holding it close to his face. 'It's like you,' he continued, 'and yet it's not like you. It doesn't do you justice. It doesn't bring out your expression, or your—eh—wonderful eyes.'

'Don't be stupid!' said Alison.

When the album was finished, James turned to the bookcase. A shelf of red and blue books, with heavily-gilt backs which no one could mistake, attracted his attention. He took down one and opened it.

'Ah!' he exclaimed, with lifted eyebrows. 'Your prizes, Miss Hepburn!' He went over several of them quickly. 'Arithmetic, history, geography, English literature, elocution, French, general excellence—first prizes in everything,' he said. 'It's too terrible. I never got a prize in my life.'

'Oh, that doesn't mean anything, or, if it does, it means the opposite of what you think.'

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Scott never got a prize, nor Shakespeare, I should think.'

'No,' said James, perspiring with pleasure, his resemblance to Scott and Shakespeare never having struck him before.

'It was the merest accident that I got all these prizes. There was nobody cleverer than me in the school, or I shouldn't have had them.'

Apart from its modesty, which he adored, this was, in James's estimation, a most original way of looking at things.

'Nobody cleverer! If there had been anybody cleverer! Well, that's a good one!' he said.

'I mean,' explained Alison, 'that if there had been anybody at all clever in the school, I shouldn't have had them; I'm not clever. Scott and Shakespeare weren't clever. Women, as a rule, are cleverer than men. Mrs. Browning and George Eliot, for example, were far cleverer than Scott and Shakespeare. I mean, that these two women were given to sitting down doggedly and acquiring things, whereas Scott and Shakespeare let things come as they would. Mrs. Browning and George Eliot hunted out their mental food—

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killed it, skinned it, cooked it, ate it—and it was always tough to them ; while Scott and Shakespeare—why, they just drank it in without knowing it.'

'Oh, Mr. Williamson,' said Mrs. Hepburn, 'she talks such nonsense! never mind her.'

'Oh, it's not nonsense, Mrs. Hepburn,' James retorted. 'I never heard such things. Why, it's quite wonderful! You ought to have a class in the Sunday-school, Miss Hepburn. And Byron—was Byron clever?'

'No; he was a dunce all his life.'

James chuckled and spluttered at this. Then he said, radiant at the idea of coming out with something critical:

'By-the-by, Miss Hepburn, I thought you didn't like Scott? Now, you know, you placed him along with Shakespeare just now.'

'Oh yes! But I know how great he was, although I don't quite like him in the meantime. After awhile I'll like him again. It's children and old people who read Scott most, they say.'

Mr. Hepburn came in from the shop, and they sat down to the table. To the fried potatoes, which was the usual supper twice or thrice a week, Mrs. Hepburn had added

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a hash of the cold meat originally intended for next day's dinner; and there was coffee, bread-and-butter, oat-cake, and raspberry jam.

James found everything very good indeed, and chatted with Mr. Hepburn about business and church matters.

Immediately after supper Mr. Hepburn rose.

'I have some accounts to finish,' he said. 'I wish you would come and help me, Annie'—his wife's name.

'Let me clear the table first.'

'No; I'll do that,' said Alison.

'Well, I must go now,' said James.

'Must you?' queried Mr. Hepburn, in a disappointed tone.

'There's no hurry, Mr. Williamson,' said Mrs. Hepburn reproachfully.

'They'll be wondering what's come over me at home. I had no intention of being so late.'

'In that case, we won't press you, Mr. Williamson,' said Mr. Hepburn.

James reached for his hat.

'Mr. Williamson's going to help me to clear away the dishes,' said Alison, with a heightened colour and a catch in her voice.

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‘ Oh, of course, with pleasure,’ said James, upsetting a coffee-cup.

‘ Alison!’ exclaimed Mrs. Hepburn. ‘ For shame! Do you know what you’re saying?’

‘ But I want to,’ said James.

‘ You two old fogeys go away,’ said Alison, with unusual briskness, and taking a liberty with her father and mother, the like of which she had never used before. ‘ Mr. Williamson and I’ll manage all right.’

‘ Alison,’ said Mrs. Hepburn, ‘ you’re forgetting yourself entirely.’

But her husband pulled her skirt, and they left the parlour together.

Two cups were washed and dried in silence—Alison very grave, James grinning from ear to ear.

‘ Well, but,’ stammered James at last, resuming the conversation that had been interrupted on entering the house, while he polished the third cup vigorously, ‘ if you can’t marry on two hundred and fifty per ann., the world would begin to stop.’

‘ But what could a husband and wife do on two hundred and fifty per ann., as you call it?’

Why, they could have a nice little house

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and a piano and a good general servant, and they could ask their friends to little parties ; and when they came home from church-meetings and soirées and things, there's their cosy parlour all to themselves, a fine fire, and a bit of supper laid. And they could practise the hymns. Oh, you've no idea how comfortable it would be !'

' I see.'

' Well ?'

' But you couldn't go to a good seat in the theatre whenever you wanted to, or visit London and Paris now and again.'

' No,' said James, in dull amazement. ' No.'

' Do you go to the theatre often ?'

' Me ! I never was in a theatre in my life. Were you ?'

' I only went once for half an hour—on the sly, of course. I saw the first act of " Othello " —it made me quite giddy. Then the orchestra began after the curtain fell, and I felt like to cry out with anger. I wanted the play to go on, on, on. And I came away. But I mean to go now openly.'

' Oh !' said James, at a loss. ' Of course,' he went on stammering, ' you being such a good elocutionist !'

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‘Yes,’ said Alison, draining a saucer into the slop-basin in which she was washing the dishes. ‘Wouldn’t you like to go to the theatre?’

‘Well—isn’t it wrong? Of course, you’re not a member of the church, and——’

‘No; but I can easily join it, can’t I?’

‘Oh!’ said James, twisting his face in a perplexed grin.

‘Do you know what I did the other night?’

‘No.’

‘I went to London.’

‘To London?’

‘Yes; but I hear father and mother coming. Don’t say anything about this before them.’

‘No, no, I won’t,’ said James, gratified by this secret understanding. ‘But you must tell me all about it.’

‘So I will some day.’

‘Oh, but soon!’

‘Well, to-morrow night? Half-past eight on the North Bridge.’

Alison remained in the parlour after her father and mother had gone to bed. Having read a little in an anthology of verse, she

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took from her pocket the few pages of 'A Godless Universe' which she had preserved. She went over them carefully, and without excitement.

'What paltry trash!' she said, blushing deeply.

The fire was almost out, but she gathered the embers together, and blew them into a blaze. Then she lit her manuscript, and, with a sick smile, watched it burn.

'That's done,' she said, poking the charred pieces of paper into the glowing ash. 'We can practise the hymns!' she muttered, as she went upstairs to bed.

Next morning she professed to be too ill to rise. She refused to eat anything, and lay in bed all day. When she came into the parlour at tea-time, her father and mother looked very gloomy; but nothing was said in the presence of Tom and Kate. At half-past seven she visited Jenny Macintosh, who was in a reminiscent mood, and talked, now to herself, now to Alison.

'Naething but taties and rye-bread, lassie, and sometimes nae saut at a', it was that dear. But there was nae puir folk then: a'body helped their neebour; an' beggars



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was better aff than mony hard-wrocht folk are the noo. It was the Jubilee Year that I cam to Embro'—George the Third's Jubilee. Lod, lassie, there was them, an' I kent them, that lived for weeks on what they got that day. They had nae system ava, I'm thinkin'; their richt haun' kent naething about their left; they gied in thae days wi' baith nieves. And then I merrit. You're gettin' a lump o' a lassie, noo, Elison. Hae ye ever a jo? But you'll dae brawly for twa year yet. I was auchteen when I merrit. Aye! then I kent I was in the warl', wi' a growin' fem'ly, an' wark at ither hooses forbye my ain! But he was a guid man—a guid man was Macintosh. Had it no been for the carritches, though, I wad niver hae warstled through. There's an awfu' poo'r o' help in the Shorter Catechism. We'll hae it noo.'

Alison took the Catechism.

'“What offices doth Christ execute as our Redeemer?”' she asked, remembering where they had left off the night before.

'“Christ as our Redeemer,”' replied Jenny in a high-pitched voice, swaying her body to the curious, careful, childish rhythm in which

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she delivered the answer, ““executeth the offices of a Prophet, of a Priest, and of a King, both in His estate of humiliation and exaltation.’”

Jenny said five questions, finishing up triumphantly with ‘Christ’s exaltation’—a great favourite.

““Christ’s exaltation consisteth in His rising again from the dead on the third day, in ascending up into heaven, in sitting at the right hand of Goad the Father, and—in coming to judge the world—at—the—last—day.” The last day—the last day,’ she repeated several times. ‘Noo, read the ninth o’ the Romans. Begin—aye, begin at the fourteenth verse.’

Alison turned up the place in Jenny’s Bible, and read :

““What shall we say, then ? Is there unrighteousness with God ? God forbid. For He saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that hath mercy. For the Scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised

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thee up, that I might show My power in thee, and that My name might be declared throughout all the earth. Therefore hath He mercy on whom He will have mercy, and whom He will He hardeneth.” ’

‘Aye,’ interjected Jenny. ‘Bide a wee. “Therefore hath He mercy on whom He will have mercy, and whom He will He hardeneth.” Aye! Umphumph! Marvellous! That’s Goad! Weel?’

“ ‘Thou wilt say then unto Me,’ ” continued Alison, “ ‘Why doth He yet find fault? For who hath resisted His will? Nay, but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?’ ” ’

Alison paused. She heard a husky, relaxed throat say, ‘By God, she’s uglier awake than asleep!’ and an old slippery voice reply, ‘So much the better for her.’

‘Aye!’ said Jenny. ‘Weel, yes, ye may juist stop there. That’s the teuchest ane that was ever written in the Bible, or oot o’t, lassie. And there cam’ a Salvationist the

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ither day speirin' if I was saved ! A piece o' damned impidence ! What div I ken ? I tell't her it was nane o' her business : an' says she, speakin' far ben in her coal-scuttle bannet, "But it's everybody's business, Missis Macintosh." "Weel," says I, "what's iverybody's business is naebody's business," an' she smilt a kin' o' a weak smile. "Gae wa'," says I ; "we've naething tae dae wi' that ; it's only Goad kens that." "But," says she, "you surely hope you won't go to hell?" "Why sud I hope onything o' the sort, if it's Goad's wull?" says I. "Oh, Missis Macintosh," quo' she, "you must surely be lookin' for some reward after all these toilsome years?" "An' what for sud I?" says I. "There's them that's been as sair trauch'lt as me, starvin' in the puirshoose, or begging their bread frae door tae door the noo, an' me sittin' here as crouse as ye like wi' a pension an' naething tae dae but twiddle my thoombs. It's gey like I hae gotten my reward in this warl' a'ready ; an' it's maybe juist because Goad kens what I'll hae tae thole in the neist. I ken my ain ken," says I, and sent her awa wi' a flea in her lug. Set them up, wi' their tambourines !

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I'se warrant there's no ane o' them could say as muckle as "Man's chief en'."

'Well, good-night, Jenny.'

'Gude-nicht, Elison. You'll be up by the morn—if we're spar't?'

'Ay, Jenny.'

Although she had ten minutes to come and go on, Alison hurried to the North Bridge. James was there before her—had been for fully a quarter of an hour.

'Oh! Miss Hepburn! How do you do?'

'How tiresome you are,' said Alison. 'Can't you say, "Good-evening, Miss Hepburn," or—"Alison?"'

'Can I—may I—call you—Alison?'

'Don't get excited.'

James chuckled, enraptured with this continuance of the familiar manner Alison had adopted the night before.

'Where shall we go?' he said.

'Let us take a walk along Princes Street.'

Along Princes Street they went.

'You were never in a theatre,' said Alison. 'But were you ever with one of these?'

'What? One of what?' exclaimed James, looking about him distractedly.

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Alison nodded her head in the direction of some furs and feathers that passed.

‘God forbid!’ said James, aghast. ‘Why! Miss Hepburn!’

‘But aren’t you courting me?’ said Alison.

‘I am,’ said James. ‘I am.’

‘And you want to marry me?’

‘Yes,’ gasped James.

‘Well, then, haven’t I a right to know if you’ve led a pure life?’

‘Oh! I wasn’t looking at it in that light. Of course you have Miss—Alison. I’ve led a very pure life, I assure you.’

‘What an awful cad you are!’ cried Alison, stopping short, and looking him up and down scornfully.

‘Well—I never! You’re a most tantalizing, fascinating thing.’

‘It’s “fascinating,”’ said Alison fiercely. ‘Fas-cin-at-ing! And don’t call me a “thing.”’

‘Well,’ rejoined James sheepishly, ‘I’ll remember. Fas-cig—Everyone I know, Alison, says “fascinating”—as far as I can remember, that is.’

She replied with a look.

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‘Fas-cin-at-ing. I’ll remember,’ he said.

They walked side by side, but with fully two feet between for a minute.

‘It’s—it’s like crossing the Rubicon,’ said James, sidling up awkwardly. ‘I’m very sorry for having offended you. I hope——’

‘Oh, don’t be stupid,’ said Alison, taking his arm.

‘Ha!’ exclaimed James, and chuckled. ‘And why did you go to London, then?’ he asked.

‘Oh, just to see it,’ she answered.

‘Just to see it?’

‘Yes: I took a run up to have a look at the place. I suppose you’ve often been in London?’

‘Yes; I’ve been once or twice on business.’

‘I want to live in London.’

‘But you’ll marry me all the same, Alison?’

‘You’ve never asked me yet.’

‘Never? No! Well, will you?’

‘Yes.’

‘And I wonder if it could be soon?’

‘Of course it could.’

‘Could we get married next month, just as soon as I’m made a partner?’

‘Yes, James.’

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James laughed a little uncomfortably.

‘Ah!’ he said, after a minute’s silence, ‘you must come right away and see my father and mother.’

‘I can’t,’ said Alison; ‘I’m not dressed. But *you* must come and see *my* father and mother.’

James kissed her quickly on the mouth as they turned back towards Leith Walk.

‘Don’t! you mustn’t! You must never do that!’

It was almost a scream; her face glowed dusky-red in the dim lamplight, and her eyes glared on him.

‘I beg your pardon,’ he said. ‘I shouldn’t have done it in the street; but nobody noticed.’

‘But you must never do it anywhere—till we’re married.’

‘Not kiss you!’

‘No.’

‘Do you love me, Alison?’ he asked, with a gasp.

‘Oh, how can you ask that? Have I not promised to marry you?’

‘Yes, yes. Well, then, and what did you think of London?’



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‘ Oh, I never saw it—just some busses and a fog.’

‘ How long were you there ?’

‘ About seven minutes. For a minute and a half I looked at the busses and the fog, and for the other five and a half minutes I walked about the Great Northern Station.’

‘ Well, I never ! What on earth did you do it for ?’

‘ I was wearied and sick of everything, and there was no help anywhere, and nobody to—— Oh, and I couldn’t endure it any longer.’

‘ Nobody to—nobody to love you ?’

‘ How could I tell ? You never said anything but “ Oh, Miss Hepburn, how do you do ? ” And I—I didn’t know what I was doing, I was so desperate.’

‘ Oh, Alison ! You loving me all the time like that, and me not knowing it !’

‘ Hush ! people are looking at us.’

\* \* \* \* \*

Mr. and Mrs. Hepburn, genuinely devout and dutiful people, felt that their daughter’s marriage with young Williamson would open a miraculous door of deliverance. They saw in it God’s hand preparing a means for

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Alison's regeneration, and also preparing a path whereby they themselves, in their declining years, might be led by quiet waters.

‘James Williamson,’ said Mr. Hepburn, ‘is really a religiously-inclined young man. There is nothing of the tinkling cymbal about him. He is respected by everybody in the church, and, young as he is, I shouldn’t be at all surprised to find him appointed an elder in a year or two.’

‘What I admire about him,’ said Mrs. Hepburn, ‘is his carrying his religion into his business. He is so upright in all his dealings, and no conceit; that’s what I like about him. Of course Alison’s as good as he; but nobody could have blamed him if he had gone where there was money.’

‘No,’ rejoined Mr. Hepburn; ‘the great matter is that she will be the wife of a religious man, and must soon be brought into the fold. She has been led, poor lassie! by strange ways.’

‘Yes,’ said Mrs. Hepburn. ‘I should think marriage ’ll knock the nonsense out of her, and open her eyes to her duty. It is almost a pity that her life will not be a little harder—to begin with, at least. With two

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hundred and fifty a year she will hardly ever need to soil her fingers !'

Mrs. Hepburn changed a sigh into a cough as she looked at her own horny hands.

But Mr. and Mrs. Williamson were not particularly pleased with their son's choice.

'Well, what do you think of it all?' said Mr. Williamson.

'I think,' said Mrs. Williamson, 'that it's rather a pity. But there's this to be said for James: he has not been led off his feet by a pretty face. There must be something attractive in her character.'

'I dare say. She is pleasant enough, too. There's one thing: she's been brought up frugally; she'll take care of his money for him.'

'And that's something,' assented Mrs. Williamson heartily. 'I was always afraid lest he should make up with one of those Dickson girls. And they don't dress well, either; they were perfect frights last Sunday. Oh, James might have done worse, I believe. And let us hope that it's His guidance.'

'She's not a member, I understand?'

'No, not yet; but of course she'll join the church at once.'

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'I suppose so. Hepburn's a decent fellow. He's in pretty shallow water, though. His wife's rather a hard-mouthed woman, isn't she? How many other children have they?'

'Only two. I know what you're thinking: you're afraid James may be marrying a family. You needn't; I'll take care of that.'

## THE MEMBER FOR GOTHAM.

‘GOOD-MORNING,’ said the Member for Gotham the moment the interviewer entered his sanctum. ‘Whatever your business may be, I hope you will state it as briefly as possible. I am very busy preparing a programme for my Premiership in 1900.’

An epigrammatic reply in commendation of his own brevity was on the interviewer’s lips, but he improved on it, brilliant as it was, by putting his first question :

‘Will you allow me to interview you?’

‘There is as yet no law against interviewing,’ said the Member for Gotham thoughtfully, as he made a memorandum.

‘You think there ought to be?’ the interviewer suggested.

‘I don’t think about it,’ said the Member for Gotham.

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‘ Well then, since the subject is started, will you give me your opinion of interviewing ?’

‘ Is it worth a thought ? It is one of the recognised forms of advertisement ; the interviewer is paid for his work ; and since there is no law against it, as long as two parties are served it will continue. Where is the use of having an opinion about it ? That won’t change it, or do away with it.’

‘ Where is the use of having an opinion about anything, then ?’

‘ Quite so !’ said the Member for Gotham, lighting a cigarette.

‘ Then, have you no opinions ?’

‘ Humph ! It’s too difficult ! Ask me another.’

‘ What do you think of——’

‘ Don’t ask me what I think. Ask me something I know.’

‘ But that’ll never do. That’s not how an interview is conducted. If people only said what they knew, interviewing would be asphyxiated. You must express opinions whether you have them or not ; you must make guesses, hint scandals ; you must colour everything you say with——’

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‘I understand—with falsehood.’

‘No; with your individuality.’

‘The distinction escapes me.’

‘You are not very complimentary to yourself. But I must get on. You wish me to ask you something you know. Now, what do you know?’

‘I know,’ said the Member for Gotham, ‘what I mean to do when I’m Premier.’

‘Then, you know that you will be Premier?’

‘It is the only thing that can be predicted with certainty.’

‘Well, then, when you are Premier, what will you do with the House of Commons? How will you manage it?’

‘You do not seem to me quite to understand your business. You should put questions in detail. Give me a cue.’

‘I see. How would you do away with the present waste of time in Parliament?’

‘I would begin by raising the standard of membership.’

‘How would you do that?’

‘I would make Parliament a branch of the Civil Service.’

‘Again—how?’

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‘First of all, no man should be eligible for election under thirty years of age. Once elected, he would be allowed to remain in Parliament as long as he could find a constituency, and meet certain requirements.’

‘Certain requirements?’

‘Yes. Let me see, now. I would establish seminaries of politics and statesmanship in which intending M.P.’s, having graduated at a University, would study for three years. The ordinary Master of Arts degree would do, but there would be only one degree in Politics and Government. When a man is going to help to govern the British Empire, he should take his degree in Statesmanship with first-class honours.’

‘Do you think, then, that competitive examination selects the best men?’

‘I do not; but my examination would not be competitive. The actual competition would take place, as now, on the platform.’

‘I understand. But how would this plan save time in Parliament? It is your best educated men, as education goes, who talk the most there.’

‘And necessarily. The rank and file require to have the meaning of the various



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measures driven into them by debate. But don't you see that if every man were gifted with the power of understanding a Bill independently of the exposition of others, there would be no need for discussion ?'

'But is it not the case that many of the best educated men in the House of Commons study very few of the Bills ?'

'That is so ; but I have a plan to meet that difficulty.'

'What is that ?'

'I would simply abolish debate. In the House of Commons during my Premiership, not a sound shall be heard from year's end to year's end, except the tread of statesmen.'

'And a cough occasionally.'

'Quite so.'

'But how—how ?'

'The Crystal Palace shall be the House of Commons in my time. There the Speaker and I shall preside, and there the members of Parliament shall write examination-papers on each Bill. There is space enough at Sydenham for the six hundred odd members to sit at such distances from each other that neither a whispered nor a written word could

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pass unobserved. The questions shall be exhaustive, and the Opposition shall examine the papers of the party in power, and the party in power the papers of the Opposition.'

'And what would constitute a failure?'

'Anything short of seventy per cent.'

'And the penalty?'

'The plucked member would be disabled from voting for the measure he had failed to comprehend. If any man failed three times, he would be sent down to his constituency.'

'Would he go?'

'He would more likely apply for the Chiltern Hundreds. But if a thrice-plucked man had the hardihood to face his constituents, and could show such a plausible case that they were willing to give him another chance, he would be allowed to keep his seat; but on the first failure after that, a new writ would be issued for the borough he represented.'

'What an overwhelming amount of work would be inflicted on members by this scheme!'

'Let me see,' said the Member for Gotham, rubbing his nose. 'I have computed that my system would reduce a country squire from

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sixteen stone to a living skeleton in six months; and the strongest men, physically and intellectually, would be killed off or incapacitated, on an average, in three years. A Gladstone might last you some seven or eight.'

'Would that not be a wanton sacrifice?'

'I don't see it. Every year two or three hundred men are sacrificed in providing coal; hundreds are offered up to Mammon on railways and the high seas, and three millions, we are told, are starving in order that I may smoke cigarettes, and you waste your time hearing me talk. Don't make any mistake. You're a luxury, Mr. Interviewer. If a House-of-Commons-full of men were to work themselves to death every three years in an endeavour at last to govern the British Empire rationally, it seems to me that it would simply be the performance of a duty. It would, besides, provide naturally for triennial Parliaments. If Tom, Dick, and Harry, to the number of six hundred, plunged into the mouth of Hell at a wrong order in 1854, and are ready, as we know they are, in the name of duty to do the same to-day to the number of six hundred hundred, we can surely find a

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House of Commons willing to die in harness every three years !'

' But is it necessary ?'

' Something's necessary, and I'm going to try it when I'm Premier.'

Having said that with great emphasis, the Member for Gotham picked up his programme to signify that the interview was over, and the interviewer took his leave.

## TALKING AGAINST TIME.

THE world shall now know under what extraordinary circumstances Onesimus Iremonger withdrew from the contest in the by-election at Belminster, Kent.

Until the moment of his retiral, he was on the best of terms with his committee. Even old Jasper Snoxell, the chairman, and the wealthiest and most ill-natured man in Belminster, had whispered to the secretary, loud enough for Iremonger to hear, that he was, on the whole, not altogether dissatisfied with his attitude—towards one or two questions, at any rate. On the eve of the nomination-day, a meeting of the committee, at which Iremonger was present, lasted till nearly midnight. It was on the point of breaking up, when the following letter was handed to the candidate :

## TALKING AGAINST TIME

‘DEAR IREMONGER,

‘Snoxell will get a letter at the same time as you get this, or shortly after. He will want to rush out immediately. Don’t let him. Keep him in the committee-room till after twelve, by fair means or foul. Get him into an argument. That’s the best plan. He would sacrifice his chance of salvation any day to have the last word. My happiness, my life, and the happiness and life of another, depend on your keeping Snoxell prisoner till twelve o’clock has rung.

‘Yours ever,

‘ARTHUR ARMSTEAD.’

‘Armstead!’ said Iremonger to himself. ‘He has come back, then, after all!’

Armstead had bullied him at school, beaten him at college, been in and out of Parliament twice before Iremonger had delivered his first electioneering speech, and had left Britain in high dudgeon over something or other almost a year before the date of the Belminster by-election. They had always been warm friends in the remarkable unsentimental manner of the modern British Damon and Pythias. Iremonger would have done anything for Arm-

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stead, and Armstead would have done a good many things for Iremonger.

‘By the way,’ said Iremonger to his committee, as the old habit of doing whatever Armstead asked him revived at once, ‘there are one or two points which I should like to discuss very briefly before we go.’

The committee looked bored, and Snoxell, who prided himself on his management of affairs, and was certain that he had omitted no detail, prepared to be offended. Before Iremonger could proceed, however, a letter marked ‘Immediate’ was handed to Snoxell. As soon as he had read it he turned pale, and, forgetting his hat, made a dash for the door.

Iremonger was subject to occasional fits of vertigo. That day he had addressed three meetings in the open air, had spoken for an hour and a half in the town-hall at night, and had been with his committee since ten. He was now quite worn out. He staggered and nearly fell; a red-hot poker seemed to pass through his head; the room swam about him; his committee looked like creatures in an aquarium. Then he felt as if he were being swept down by a whirlpool, while he

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heard Armstead crying for help far out at sea. He must get up and save him. Old Armstead!—who had beaten him in everything. Ha! Except—he had nearly forgotten that—Armstead had never been able to compete with him in the comic paper of their college. Poor old Armstead!

Suddenly he saw the room as it was—the door open, and Snoxell in the act of leaving.

‘Snoxell!’ roared Iremonger.

The committee stared with open mouth. To address a chairman, and, above all, that particular chairman, without the ‘Mr.!’ They had never heard of such a thing.

‘Come back, Snoxell; I want to talk to you,’ said Iremonger at the pitch of his voice. Something was whirring in his brain, but he felt now in perfect possession of his faculties, and was much charmed with himself.

Livid and breathing hard, Snoxell re-entered the room.

‘What’s the exact time?’ he said to the secretary, his lip curling up and showing his set teeth.

‘Ten minutes to twelve.’

‘Does the west entrance to the station keep open till the express leaves?’



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‘Always.’

‘And I can go from here to the station in two minutes?’

‘Easily.’

‘Now, *Mister* Iremonger. Sir to you!’ cried Snoxell, opening and shutting his teeth with every word. He held his watch in one hand, and his hat, which the secretary had reached him, in the other.

‘Keep your temper, old man,’ said Iremonger, pale but radiant. ‘We are all yeomen of Kent here, you know. Ten minutes to twelve? Yes, all yeomen of Kent; and there’s not one of us that couldn’t talk straight on for ten minutes if we were put to it, eh?—Snoxell, Kinson, Bentlif, Walloond, Morling, Edmett, Arvad, Axelrad—good old Kentish names—and Iremonger, by Jove! There is no older family in England than the Iremongers of Kent, and no family more remarkable in its descent. The blood of Roman, Celt, Saxon and Norman circulates in my veins. “Ire,” you know, from “ira,” anger; and “monger,” pure Saxon. Therefore, a Saxon must have married the offspring of a union between a Roman and a Celt. That is mainly tradi-

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tion, but the Norman blood is in the family tree. Give me a Kentish man—give me an Iremonger—and give me Kent.'

'Why do you live in London, then?' asked Snoxell quickly.

Although always ready for a fray, he had been quite at a loss to understand why Iremonger should have turned on him. Now he saw that it was something else than a sudden heat against him, and he determined to give Iremonger as much rope as he could pay out in ten minutes.

'London!' rejoined Iremonger; 'why, London is the only safe place in Britain! And even there I never go further west than Queen's Gate, and further east than Piccadilly Circus—south to the House, and north to the Zoo.'

'You think, then, that it's safe between these points,' interjected Snoxell, paying out rope.

'Pretty safe! You see, London is so immense that I should be bound to hear of the invasion long before the army could reach Piccadilly.'

'The invasion?'

'Yes. You seem a little surprised; and

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there are, indeed, many people to whom the idea of the coming invasion is of little moment. To me it is of the first importance.'

'You think, then, that there will be an invasion. By the French?'

'By Europe.'

'Europe?'

'Yes. Europe is angry at Britain with an anger that has been growing for fifty years—for a hundred and fifty years—ever since Culloden. I should say ever since the Dutch war, in Charles II.'s time; for Humbert's abortive attempt in Ireland doesn't count.'

'Doesn't count?'

'No. Indeed, we may go back to the Spanish Armada, because no projected invasion of consequence has come up to the scratch since.'

'Ah! And the impending invasion is certain to come up to the scratch?'

'Rather! You see, every country in Europe has been overrun by alien armies, and drenched in native blood shed by swords of foreigners again and again, while positively the last parallel instance in the history

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of England is the battle of Hastings. Now, Europe is not going to stand that any longer. Except for civil wars—I count the invasion by the Dauphin in John's time civil war—England has had peace within her own borders for seven hundred years. It's absurd, gentlemen; Europe can't and won't stand it. I assure you, at any moment a million soldiers may march on London, levied by a Continental coalition. I have calculated, however, that it is more likely that the invasion will leave London to the last, in order that the whole wealth of the country may be collected there. Europe's exasperated, and means to do the thing thoroughly when it comes over. London is therefore the only place from which one is reasonably certain of being able to escape, and so I prefer to live there.'

'But the signs of the times point to war among the European Powers themselves, rather than to an invasion of Britain,' said Snoxell.

'All in the plan—all in the plan!' replied Iremonger. 'They keep threatening each other, advancing troops, and exhibiting ships in order to have a pretext for increasing and

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perfecting their armies and navies. I tell you it is impossible to conceive the rancour of the Powers against Britain. When they think that this cold, wet, disagreeable little island, inhabited by stupid people, has steadily increased in wealth, and managed to lay hold of the best parts of the world while they have been chawing each other up like rats in a cage, they foam at the mouth and gnash their teeth. Britain is doomed; Europe will kick it into the sea before twenty years are over—that is to say, if there is anything left to kick.’

‘Anything left?’

‘Yes. Have you paid no attention to the development of the woman question? Marriage, once a lottery, is now a certainty. Hitherto, the husband was occasionally mate, and more frequently master; now he is an anachronism which woman puts up with, just as we have beef-eaters in the Tower. Britain is doomed either way. If it escapes the Scylla of invasion, it falls into the Charybdis of the ‘monstrous regiment of women.’ I could almost welcome the invasion. It is the only thing that would put back the tyranny of women for another half-

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century. I venture to prophesy that within twenty years there will be a general exodus of men from these islands.'

'And the women?'

'Will pursue the men.'

'There seems to be no door of hope.'

'None. Britain is practically done for!'

'Well, then, Mr. Iremonger,' said Snoxell, pocketing his watch and putting on his hat, 'the best thing you can do is to withdraw from the election, die, and be cremated at your earliest convenience.'

'Cremated!' cried Iremonger. 'There again! If everything else fails, in cremation you have the surest if the slowest means of extinguishing the world. For everybody burnt, so much of earth is lost. In the course of ages you will gradually deplete the soil and destroy all organic matter. Don't you see? By cremation you make, as it were, the fire of doomsday chronic. No, I shall never be cremated. Earth to earth, and dust to dust. We can all be benefactors to the world at large, and at last, by paying into the great bank of life—the soil—our bill at threescore years and ten, or whenever it is due. I have thought over all these

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matters. I have considered everything.' Here Iremonger began to speak with great rapidity and very loud, Snoxell having stepped towards the door. 'The world is as transparent to me as a crystal globe. Although no single one of all the contingencies that threaten it—volcanic rupture, comets, the attraction of the sun—should find an opportunity, the world, in the ordinary course of Nature, must come to an end. It is so—to an end. But I have a stupendous idea for the extension of the ordinary course of Nature. Whether we bury or cremate, the soil will ultimately lose its virtue. But if we could call up virgin soil from the deep! Yes, I shall write to the *Times* to-morrow. We must take a lesson from the coral insect, and, by means of ocean burials, create new continents. I shall work it out. I see it! Let us talk it over.'

At this point the town clock began to strike twelve. With an oath Snoxell started to run, but Iremonger seized him by the coat-collar, and held him while he shouted in his ear, nodding his head emphatically as he counted the strokes:

'Two—first of all, we—three—should have

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to start with—four—the bodies of criminals—five—use up human waste—six—with the bodies of criminals—seven—we could settle the hash of the Goodwin Sands—eight—an island in place of the Goodwin Sands—nine—on a foundation of French—ten—and British criminals—eleven—with a middle stratum of—twelve—— Hurrah for old Armstead !’

‘Confound you!’ cried Snoxell, as a rumbling shook the room. ‘The London express has gone ; and—what do you know of Armstead ?’

Iremonger, breathless, perspiring, and with a sickly smile on his face, had thrown himself down at full length on a sofa.

‘Armstead?’ he replied. ‘My oldest friend.’

‘Your oldest friend!’ echoed Snoxell, falling into a chair. ‘Then I’m the dupe of a pair of shameless adventurers.’

‘Gentlemen,’ said Iremonger quickly, ‘I have no explanation to offer, and neither, I think, has the chairman in the meantime.’

Snoxell nodded.

‘One thing I wish to say, Mr. Snoxell: I



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had no idea Armstead was in England, and have neither seen nor heard anything of him for a year, until I got his letter ten minutes ago.'

'What the—— But it doesn't matter,' rejoined Snoxell. 'You have one other thing to say, I think, Mr. Iremonger,' he added significantly.

'Yes,' rejoined Iremonger. 'Believe me, gentlemen, I have no distinct—I have really no recollection at all of what I said. I deeply regret what has happened; it was, however, unavoidable so far as I am concerned. I must, of course, retire from the contest, and I shall now write at once a formal resignation of my candidature on the score of sudden illness—an attack, gentlemen, to the reality of which you can witness.'

\* \* \* \* \*

Two days after, Iremonger, breakfasting late in his rooms in King's Bench Walk, was surprised by visitors.

'Mr. and Mrs. Armstead.'

'What ridiculous news is this?' cried Armstead.

'My retiral, you mean? Well—— Heavens, Miss Snoxell!'

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‘Mrs. Armstead now, old fellow.’

‘I begin to understand. Perhaps it was on her account you left England a year ago?’

‘It was, Mr. Iremonger,’ said Mrs. Armstead, in a fine tremor. ‘But what a dreadful thing I have done! Can you ever forgive me?’

‘For making Armstead happy?’

‘Oh no! For causing you to lose the election.’

‘I’m rather thankful than otherwise. I lost my head, and said things my committee could never forgive. It is better to make a fool of one’s self privately in Belminster than publicly in the House of Commons, as I should infallibly have done sooner or later. Pray consider that you have rendered me a service, my dear Mrs. Armstead. Have some tea, and tell me all about it.’

‘Act first,’ said Armstead: ‘I fall in love with the orphan lady. Uncle Snoxell, who has managed his niece’s money for fifteen years, insists on a marriage with his own son. Lady of age, but dare not run counter to her guardian, a strong old fellow—you know him. Act second: I leave England in de-

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spair. No sooner have I sailed than the lady acquires courage to brave her uncle, and sends a letter which follows me half round the world. Act third: Letter received. I hasten home. Interview with lady easy on account of election bustle. Flight arranged. Suborned maid betrays at last moment to Snoxell's son, my rival, a foolish youth; then repents and confesses betrayal to me. Act fourth: Brilliant idea—employ Iremonger as *deus ex machina*. No sooner thought than done. Works like magic. Young Snoxell loiters feebly about the station awaiting his father. I hail him from the carriage and offer him a cigar, which he takes—feebly. “I say, you know,” he says, “you’ve got Maud in there. It’ll never do. My father’s coming.” I bet him ten to one that his father won’t come. He accepts, and tosses—feebly—a sovereign at the carriage window as the train moves off. Act fifth: Marriage. The bride and bridegroom visit the good Iremonger.’

‘Epilogue: “Bless you, my children.”’

BANDEROLE'S ÆSTHETIC BILL.

‘ YOU’RE gloomy, Banderole.’

‘ I always am in March.’

‘ How’s that ?’

‘ Because in March I mourn for my Æsthetic Bill.’

‘ Your Æsthetic Bill ?’

‘ Yes ; have you never heard of it ?’

‘ Never. Tell me about it, Banderole.’

‘ Shall I ? Well, I suppose I may. But I must premise. Look at me, Magsworth. If you were to characterize me, you would say that I am a man of a passable appearance, with—ah—a certain undignified frankness—shall we call it?—and a pleasant voice. Come, now, we’ve known each other for about a week ; and that’s your opinion, isn’t it ? Well-spoken, well-looking, carelessly frank, and—shrewd withal ?’

‘ Yes ; I may think that you are perhaps a

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little partial to yourself ; but that's about my opinion.'

'Quite so. That is the opinion I have of myself; that is the opinion all my new acquaintances form of me; but it is not the opinion of my old friends; and in six months it will cease to be yours if you continue knowing me.'

'I shall continue knowing you if for no other reason than to test the truth of what you say.'

'Very well. It was not until I was forty that I discovered what my intimates thought of me. Until my fortieth year, the good-natured, undemonstrative deference with which those who knew me best treated me appeared to me a tribute to my shrewdness. I use the word "shrewdness" now; six years ago I should have employed some such phrase as "great talents," "indisputable capacity," or "remarkable gifts"; but I have had a lesson.'

'Lessons *are* learnt occasionally even in these days, when people are afraid to acknowledge that they were ever taken in—even by themselves.'

'Quite true. One day, *à propos* of some-

## BANDEROLE'S ÆSTHETIC BILL

thing I had said, an acquaintance exclaimed, "You can't mean that ! It's not in keeping with the transparent simplicity of your character." I forget what it was I had said, but that remark about myself was a revelation to me. I went home with it, and sat down and thought it out. Clearly my intimates considered me a merely ingenuous person ; brusque people took the edge off their manners in dealing with me, not because they feared me, but because they looked upon me as a child ; and the wind was tempered for me generally. It was a painful process, I can tell you, having my eyes couched of the self-complacent belief that others thought me a thorough man of the world. Then for a while I liked my being misunderstood. To have the reputation of a simpleton and to be a Macchiavelli is to enjoy a position of great power ; and I went about for weeks revelling in a perfect analysis of the motives of all my acquaintances. I saw how they wanted to protect me, to aid me, to save me ; I had only to ask for a thing to have it ; everybody wished to be able to say, "I, too, did something for that dear fellow Banderole." I tired of that, however, and deter-

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mined at last to appear in my true colours ; but it was a most hopeless undertaking.'

'It has been said that there is nothing more difficult to live down than a good reputation.'

'And well said ; I found it so. When I did anything in the *rôle* of Macchiavelli, people took it as a joke, and it was decided that my simplicity of character grew daily more transparent. It was to no purpose that I said the bitterest things about all my friends ; they simply quoted them to each other as Banderole's latest, and agreed that none but a man of the most ingenuous nature could have detected and characterized their faults and foibles so unerringly. I despaired of ever appearing as I really am in the ordinary walks of life ; so after much cogitation I hit upon a distinctly original idea. Did you ever have a distinctly original idea ?'

'I'm not sure.'

'Well, if you ever have one, you will enjoy it, at first ; and then you will be in an agony till you make up your mind what to do with it. One's first penny in one's first breeches' pocket is an icicle compared to one's first original idea. There are so many things you

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can do with an original idea. You may exemplify it in your life——'

'And get run in.'

'You may put it into a magazine article——'

'And be snubbed for a plagiarist. You may imbed it in a play, or bury it in three volumes; you may paint it, or carve it, or sing it, and nobody will look at it or listen to it.'

'You understand the matter. But if you put it into a Bill and get it passed, why, there you are for ever and ever with the British Constitution. So I drew up a Bill incorporating my original idea. By that Bill I expected at one stride to step upon a pedestal, and exhibit once for all that breadth and subtlety which, as long as I was only one man more in the street, escaped the observation even of those who knew me best.'

'But you were never in Parliament?'

'No, but the Marquis of Wagstaff's son promised to get his father to introduce the Bill into the House of Lords. You see, it was really a sort of sumptuary Bill, and the Lords was the proper place for it, I was told. I called it a "Bill for the Beautifying of Britain," or, briefly, an "Æsthetic Bill."'



## BANDEROLE'S ÆSTHETIC BILL

‘Umph! Go on.’

‘The Bill arranged for externals only.’

‘Right. If the outside of the platter be clean, it follows that the inside will also be clean.’

‘I am glad you think so. It was my opinion. I have found that the best shops make the finest show, in spite of proverbs to the contrary. I made no attempt to be comprehensive, believing that, if in one or two vast concerns an æsthetic reformation were effected, the details would practically work out themselves. I began with railways. My Bill provided that railways should be bordered all their length by gardens, and so become, as it were, rivers of flowers flowing across and along the whole land. The lines themselves were to be made of steel, damascened with arabesques in brass and silver. The stations were all to be castles, kiosks, pavilions, with drawing-rooms, dining-rooms, smoking-rooms, upholstered artistically. I worked out a new type of carriage superior to anything that has ever been seen before; and I introduced a clause requiring all electricians, under a heavy penalty, to labour at the development of electro-motion. I

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made it penal to advertise in railway-stations ; but that was covered by a general clause, forbidding all mural and open-air advertisement. It seems to be so simple. Stop advertising, and nobody would be a penny the worse. On the contrary, a great many people would be infinitely better in temper and digestion, for you would reduce measurably the worry of competition.'

' And what about those whose occupations would be gone—advertising-agents and bill-stickers ?'

' My dear Magsworth, my Æsthetic Bill provided occupation for more people than are ever likely to want work. Consider the immense army of gardeners required for the railway-borders, of skilled craftsmen to keep my damascened lines in order. In everything I touched I provided work—artistic work—for thousands.'

' Yes ; but about this advertising. There are many miles of dead wall in suburban lines that would be even more sombre and depressing were it not for the enamel and colour of wines, perfumery, etc.'

' I would have the bill-stickers taught fresco-painting—they can already wield a

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brush ; and they should then cover these walls with designs and pictures.'

'And the economy of it? How, for example, would your railways pay?'

'The simplest thing in the world. The Government would, of course, take them all over ; there would be only one class, and one fare—a penny ; you would stick a stamp in your hat and go anywhere—from Charing Cross to Westminster or Wick. What would be the result of such an arrangement? Why, Britain would practically reside on its railways ; and you would have on every line, not a constant succession of trains, but one long unbroken train, going and coming, all day, all night. And the income—I've worked it out. Suppose twenty million people travelled a day—and I consider that below the average—you would have, at a penny a head, considerably over £30,000,000 per annum ; but at least two-thirds of the passengers would return the same day, which would give you a gross income of £50,000,000.'

'Figures like these speak for themselves. And how did you get on with Lord Wagstaff?'

## BANDEROLE'S ÆSTHETIC BILL

‘ Well, when I had the Bill drafted, I read it to Wagstaff’s son. He was in a hurry at the time, but promised to tell his father about it. I offered to send him a copy, but he said he must speak about it first. Next week he went off for a two-years’ tour round the world, and I don’t believe he said a word to his father, for I wrote the Marquis three times and received no reply. It was in March I drew up my Bill. I have never had such a time of pleasurable excitement since : hence my gloom.’

‘ And you never got on the pedestal ?’

‘ No. Yet I expounded my Bill to all my friends. It is my unfortunate reputation as a merely ingenuous person that stands in the way. I have overheard people, after the most eloquent exposition, saying, “ Sweet soul, Banderole !” “ Delightful creature !” “ So simple and confiding !” Now, Magsworth, honestly, tell me your opinion of my Bill.’

‘ I really haven’t time. I have to go—I’m afraid I’m off on a two-years’ tour round the world.’

## AMONG THE ANARCHISTS.

‘WE can’t go in there,’ I said to the acquaintance who had persuaded me to visit a foreign club in Whitechapel.

It was cold ; we were in a dark, narrow street ; a drunken sailor lounged past us, grumbling at the universe ; my companion had knocked at a low door, and upon its being opened I had recoiled from the noisome-looking entry ; the physical discomfort of dirt and evil smells seemed a price too dear for the new experience I had agreed to undergo.

‘You can’t go back now ; it’s quite clean inside,’ replied my companion ; he had visited the club more than once.

In we went, through an open court, and along a narrow, ill-lit passage—I shuddering and holding my breath, my companion whistling and unbuttoning his overcoat—and up some wooden steps to a landing, where a

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man, like an Italian, met us at the door of a little room. To him my companion said something, which he afterwards assured me was a greeting in Yeddish, the Hebrew-German patois. He also nodded to a woman who was selling ginger-beer to two fur-capped men; she was a blonde Jewess, stout, pleasant-looking, neatly dressed, with a cigarette between her lips. Some more steps brought us into a small well-lit hall with a stage and curtain at one end. It was quite clean, the plain deal benches bearing still the marks of a recent scouring. On the walls were inscriptions in Hebrew letters; a large cartoon of the Chicago anarchists, Spies, Parsons, Lingard, Engel, and Fischer, who were executed a few years ago; and an engraving of Lassalle—coarse; almost a caricature; like a composite photograph of Peace, the murderer, and Lord Randolph Churchill. Some half-dozen men were hanging about the door—Polish Jews, my companion said.

We took seats near the middle of the room, and had not long to wait before it filled up. It was about five minutes to eight when we entered, and by eight o'clock there were nearly two hundred people assembled, men,

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women, and children ; all of them clean, and tidily dressed ; most of them remarkably contented and cheerful-looking ; many of them with fresh complexions and bright eyes ; handsome faces among both the men and the women. In height, the majority were under the average. They were nearly all Jews, I was told ; dark, blonde, auburn ; Russian, German, Polish, Italian ; by trade, mostly tailors and tailoresses. Conventional Jewish features were rare, however ; among the men, not more than every sixth face could have been at once identified as Israelitish ; there was less deviation in the women from the ordinary type.

They were all Nihilists, Anarchists, the extreme of social rebels. It was a club, but there was no smoking or beer-drinking ; they all seemed to know each other ; families, groups of intimates, sat together talking and laughing ; people moved about from seat to seat, or addressed each other across the room.

‘ Why, this is very tame,’ I said to my companion. ‘ Where are your conspirators, your incendiaries, your regicides ?’

He laughed, and bade me wait a little. Shortly a bell rang, and the curtain went

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up, discovering a chairman seated at a table. Behind him was a painted scene, and on either hand imitations of pillars and trees. He had a large brow, gray eyes, shaved cheeks, and a slight moustache. He was nattily dressed, authoritative-looking, evidently of more than average intelligence; only slightly Jewish in the cast of his features; liker an English than a foreign Jew. A carafe with water, a tumbler, and a hand-bell were on the table.

The chairman said a few words in Yeddish, which made his hearers laugh; then he announced a speaker and sat down.

A man left the audience, and entered on the scene from the right. He was rather tall, with very fair hair and fairer beard; mild, blue eyes; black clothes fitting him loosely; dishevelled, uplifted, the type of an enthusiast; not a Jew. He spoke in German, very rapidly. Only part of the audience understood him, but all were attentive. The speaker had no gesture, little motion of any kind, was diffident, self-conscious, but impressive. When he had spoken for a quarter of an hour, the chairman rang his bell. In less than five minutes the speaker wound up



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his address, and was at once questioned by two or three people successively. He gave satisfactory answers, and resumed his seat among the audience.

Then came a tall, chubby lad of seventeen or eighteen, whose appearance on the platform was hailed with cheers and laughter. He was not a buffoon, however; the audience were laughing at the recollection of humorous sayings of the youthful orator and in anticipation of fresh witticisms. He spoke slowly, smoothly, without effort, and the Yeddish had a mellow sound in his clear rich voice. Soon he had everybody shaking with laughter; they laughed quietly lest they should miss a single point. Suddenly the mirth died down, faces grew pale, and tears came into the eyes of women. As suddenly the laughter burst out again, unrestrained this time, crackling and spluttering among the tears. The speaker alone seemed unmoved. It was a most remarkable display in a mere boy of the highest oratorical power.

The third and last speaker was a Polish Jew—a little dark man with a thin, pleasant enough face, and burning black eyes. He was received demonstratively, and plunged

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at once into a tirade—an indictment of Capitalism, or of Society in general, doubtless. He drove his charges home with clenched hands and a pouring delivery, which had the effect of a shower-bath on the audience, leaving them breathless and glowing all over.

After the speeches the chairman stepped down from the platform, and a *conversazione* began, everybody smiling and in the best of humour. Cigarettes, cigars, and a few pipes were now lit; and the women and children ate cakes and drank lemonade.

‘Well?’ queried my companion.

‘I am much amazed and amused,’ I said. ‘Do you know what it reminds me of?’

‘A Young Men’s Mutual Improvement Society?’

‘Very nearly. To me this meeting of Anarchists is exactly like a church *soirée*. There is, apparently, the same respectability, the same easy, simmering excitement, the same perfect confidence in the absolute uprightness of their purpose in meeting together. I should say that this club is no more dangerous to the State than a Mission-hall.’

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‘I am not so sure about the danger,’ replied my companion, ‘but I agree with the rest of what you say. Their political creed is the religion of these people; and as human nature is identical everywhere, their weekly meetings present the same phenomena as the weekly meetings of any other body of people united in doctrine. I confess that it has been somewhat tame to-night. I have seen hot debates, heard hoarse cries, and watched stealthy hands groping for revolvers and knives.’

‘What! to fight among themselves?’

‘Oh no! Excited almost to the point of running amuck.’

‘Come, now,’ I said, ‘how do you know that there are revolvers and knives here?’

My companion answered rather evasively. He had interpreted certain actions to mean the clutching of weapons; but I gathered that he had never seen either a knife or a revolver within the walls of this club.

Families, groups, sweethearts, and individuals began to leave; by half-past nine the hall was cleared. My companion introduced me, in the ante-room, to the chairman, the speakers, and several other Anarchists;

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and I started a conversation with the crude announcement 'that popular common-sense which regards Anarchism as synonymous with violence and dynamite is as right as ever it was.'

'Ah!' said the enthusiast, who spoke English correctly, and with little accent, 'that is just what Society says, "No compromise"; and that is what we say.'

'But dynamite *is* a compromise,' I rejoined. 'War in any form is, and always has been, a compromise: both parties, afraid of being put in the wrong by the "no compromise" of impartial arbitration, fly to arms.'

A tolerant smile was the only reply the enthusiast deigned to give to my paradox.

'Everything,' said the fiery Polish Jew, 'ees gompromyce. Ze woarld ees a gompromyce between ze inanity and someting.'

The enthusiast rejoined in Yeddish. It seemed to me that he was explaining to the Polish Jew his own meaning: I wish he had explained it to me. Then he went on in English, 'Yes, everything is a compromise. Life itself is the only evil, and all our organizations and schemes are a compromise, or

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an attempted compromise, with it. I refer everything to the two poles, positive and negative. The negative is the supreme unattainable good; the positive is the supreme ever-present evil. If we live we compromise; "no compromise" would be a destruction of all life in order to attain the unattainable.'

'Then you admit that the true doctrine of the Anarchists is one of destruction?'

'I do. Hegel marks the culminating point of the purely theoretic side of modern culture; therefore we have arrived precisely at the point where the necessary dissolution of that culture ought to begin.'

'Why, then, you are a Nihilist,' said my companion.

'If you like. I would prefer, however, to be called an *Annihilist*. I have never quite understood how the word Nihilist got its vogue. We don't believe in nothing; on the contrary, we are intoxicated with belief in everything conceivable, and wish to annihilate it.'

This the enthusiast said with nonchalant gravity, as if it were even simpler to organize a revolution for the annihilation of humanity than for the overthrow of a government.

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‘But would you not be content with change?’ I asked.

‘For my part, I believe change is impossible. The form may alter, has altered, again and again; but you will always have dominant and serving classes, always rich and poor.’

At this a tall, red-bearded German, who spoke good English, burst in with a disclaimer.

‘No, no!’ he cried; ‘you misrepresent Anarchism—or, at least, you may cause this gentleman to misunderstand it. Anarchism is the individual revolution as distinct from the collective revolution. The collective revolution is impossible, because we exist, not as a community, but only as individuals. You see? There is nothing above me, nothing without me, nothing within me, greater than myself. I do not submit myself to my spirit, mind you. My spirit, like my flesh, is only one of my qualities; the individual is more than soul and body.’

‘Well, now, what is the individual?’ asked my companion.

‘The individual, the *ego*!’ replied the German. ‘There are no words to define it;

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it is unsayable ; it cannot be named ; it is perfect ; every individual is every instant exactly what he can be, and nothing more or less. I know of nothing that can impose duty on me. I do not consider myself as an individual among other individuals, but as the only individuality which exists. All things—men and so-called property—are my goods and chattels in proportion as my force allows me to appropriate them.'

The enthusiast attempted an interruption at this point in the German's harangue, but the latter bore him down.

'You see, it is simply freedom,' he said, 'and one is free in proportion as one is strong ; there is no liberty except what you take. The State, Religion, Humanitarianism, Socialism—all that disappears before the sovereign ME. Truth itself signifies nothing. Thoughts are the creatures of the individual ; they are not themselves the individual. I say that to believe in a truth, in any truth, is to abdicate the individual. Thus we are all fighting against each other, and every weapon is allowable—poison, infernal machines, because all that is required to become immediately endowed with an inalienable

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right to have a thing is that one should desire to possess it.'

'Would it not be wise, then,' I asked, 'in an individual holding your opinions, to keep them to himself? For his own sake, I mean; he will have a better chance of securing what he wants if he alone acts on his "no principle." You are too benevolent; you arm everyone against you if you *tell* the world that you have taken for your creed the negation of the decalogue.'

'Error!' said the red-haired German coolly. 'It is not for love of men, still less for love of truth, that I express my thoughts, but for my own pleasure exclusively. I speak because I have a voice, and I address you because you have ears for which my voice was intended.'

'Let me speak now,' said the chairman. 'I should like this gentleman to see that there are as many kinds of Anarchism as there are men. Me, for example. I want to be a tyrant; to relieve the world of all moral clogs and world-old prejudices; to be *the* anarch, and found a new religion and a new legislative system for my own glory.'

The chairman's brief declaration elicited



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no surprise from his companions, and I received it as a matter of course.

‘I understand Anarchism now,’ I said ; ‘it is simply, Every man his own god.’

‘Precisely,’ said the enthusiast.

‘Of course you are all wrong,’ said my companion. ‘Don’t you see that Anarchism is the exaggeration of the idea of Liberty, just as Socialism is the exaggeration of the idea of Equality. Both have parted company with each other, and with Fraternity. In my opinion, Society is quite healthy, although its constitution may be run down—largely the result, I should say, of a dissipation in Liberty and Equality. You have divorced these two ideas from Fraternity, without which they cannot hold water. Did nobody ever say to you, “Little children, love one another”? Liberty, Equality, Fraternity! For the first two we want to substitute Duty and Reverence. Fraternity *means* Charity.’

Those who understood him smiled tolerantly and went for their hats; they were not there to listen. They wished us ‘Good-night’ frankly and cheerily, and my companion and I took our departure.

## THE INTERREGNUM IN FAIRYLAND.

**H**AROLDA lived with a lady whom she called aunt, in a noisy street in the north of London. She was rather a forlorn little girl, although the lady treated her very well indeed. Her uncle, as she called the lady's husband, never forgot her birthday; and when she was seven years old he gave her a book of fairy-stories, containing many coloured pictures and very little reading. Harolda was not clever, and it took her all her time to spell out the stories. But she liked stories much better than the other children in the house did, and this made her the favourite of an old lady who lived across the way, and knew a great many tales and delighted to tell them. After tea Harolda would cross the road with her doll to this old lady's house, and would hear of giants and jins and fairies, of underground palaces and

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enchanted forests, and of poor girls who had married beautiful princes. Most people would have thought Harolda a very simple-minded little girl, for she longed greatly to go to an enchanted forest ; but she never thought of setting out in search of one as long as she had the old lady to talk to.

At last, shortly before the end of Harolda's eighth year, the old lady left the neighbourhood, and nobody could say where she had gone to. So Harolda, having no one to tell her any stories, made up her mind to do nothing less than go in search of Fairyland itself ; she thought that perhaps a story might happen to her. She intended at first to ask one of the children who had called her 'cousin' to accompany her ; but she changed her mind when she remembered how they had all made such a jest of her and her fancies. Therefore she took with her only her doll and her picture-book.

It was after tea that she set out, because it was her habit at that time of the day to have her mind filled with stories of fairies and with the hope of an adventure in Fairyland. Harolda's holidays had always been spent at sea-coast places, and she had never

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seen a forest. She had heard, however, of one near London, called Epping Forest ; and it was to it she meant to go. When she had got two or three streets away from the one she lived in, she went up to a policeman who was standing on the edge of the pavement, and said to him :

‘ Please tell me the way to Epping Forest.’

The policeman looked down at her with a curious expression on his face, and said nothing for such a long time that she began to think he was an enchanted policeman.

‘ Epping Forest ?’ he exclaimed at last. ‘ Why, you’re nearly four miles from Epping Forest ! Have you lost your way ?’

‘ No,’ she said, ‘ not yet ; but I hope to when I get to the forest.’

‘ Oh, you do !’ exclaimed the policeman, not knowing what to make of Harolda, for she talked what he thought either nonsense or impudence, and yet looked so much in earnest.

‘ What direction is it ?’ asked Harolda wistfully. ‘ Will this street take me ?’

‘ It’s on the way,’ said the policeman.

‘ Thank you,’ said Harolda, and tripped off with her book and her doll.

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It was a very long street, with few turnings in it, and when she came to the end of it she already felt tired.

‘Which is the way to Epping Forest?’ she said to a postman, thinking that he would be likely to know the shortest way to anywhere.

The postman, hurrying past her, turned his head to say something over his shoulder; but Harolda had such a pleading face, and was so quaint and pretty in her looks and her dress, that the postman was constrained to stop. He looked at her curiously, as the policeman had done, and said:

‘Epping Forest! Which part of Epping Forest?’

‘I want,’ said Harolda, ‘to go to that part of Epping Forest where the fairies live and all the beasts can speak.’

‘Oh, you do?’ exclaimed the postman, just as the policeman had done. ‘Well, it’s some miles from here, I reckon. But you’d best take a train.’

‘Oh no!’ cried Harolda, with a scared look; ‘I would never think of such a thing. We must walk, unless we have an enchanted horse or something.’

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‘Well,’ said the postman, laughing, ‘take the second to the right, and keep on as far as that road goes, and then ask again.’

‘Oh, thank you!’ said Harolda.

The postman, as long as she was in sight, looked back at her wonderingly each time he delivered a letter.

Harolda was hardly able to drag one foot after another when she came to the end of the postman’s road; but she was not going to give in, so she asked a milkman this time.

‘Epping Forest!’ said the milkman. ‘Why, I come from there, and I’m going back now. Have you lost your way?’

‘Oh no!’ said Harolda. ‘How can I lose my way till I get there?’

‘Eh?’ said the milkman, who was a kind-hearted man, but not very intelligent. ‘Well, I’m going Woodford way, and you can jump in if you like.’

‘Thank you very much,’ said Harolda. ‘Is Woodford near Epping Forest?’

‘Why, it’s in it,’ replied the milkman.

Harolda wondered a little, but forbore any more questions, and stepped into the milkman’s cart.

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By rows of houses, lines of trees and high hedges, they rattled and clattered along. The milkman whistled and hummed tunes, while Harolda nursed her doll and looked at her picture-book. In half an hour's time they came among gardens and pleasant villas. Shortly after they entered a little street, and the milkman pulled up before a dairy.

‘But this is not the forest,’ said Harolda, getting out.

‘Yes, it is,’ said the milkman. ‘It’s all forest about here.’

‘But where is the place where the fairies live and all the beasts can talk?’

‘What a funny little girl you are!’ said the milkman, beginning to carry his cans into the dairy.

With a sinking heart Harolda left the milkman and went up the street. Opposite the church she met a girl a few years older than herself, and she asked her where the true forest was—‘where there are no houses, but only trees and grass and bushes and ferns, where the fairies live and all the beasts can talk.’

The girl was good-natured, and although

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she laughed at Harolda, she took her to a lane and showed her where at the end of it a wood appeared.

‘Perhaps,’ said Harolda, ‘you are a fairy.’

‘Oh no!’ replied the girl, laughing merrily.

‘And the milkman and his cart,’ said Harolda anxiously; ‘do you think they weren’t sent by the fairies?’

‘I think not,’ said the laughing girl. ‘But I don’t know what you mean.’

‘Good-bye, and thank you,’ said Harolda.

Her courage rose again at the sight of the wood, and she ran along the lane quite briskly, because she had been much rested by her ride in the milkman’s cart. She crept through a fence, and soon found herself knee-deep in feathery grass. A blush had mounted to her cheeks, which were usually rather pale, and her blue eyes glowed as if little beacons had been lit in them. She pressed on, looking eagerly into the shade; but just when she began to feel that now at last she might expect to meet a fairy, the wood came to a sudden end, and she saw a road and garden walls, and the red roofs of houses. Two big tears rolled down her cheeks, and a sob shook her little



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body; but she turned back to where the trees were thickest, and went forward in a different direction. This time she came to a close wooden fence, much too high for her to climb, and she saw clearly that she had not yet arrived in the forest. She therefore left the little wood, and, looking about her in the lane, perceived at some distance a high ridge extending east and west, and densely covered with trees. That must be the forest, she thought; and off she set straight for it through fields and over fences. It was a very tiresome way; she had to take many roundabouts, and sometimes to retrace her steps; and at last, when she thought there was nothing between her and the forest but a little plain where some horses were feeding, she fell headlong into a deep ditch, and got herself all wet and dirty, and lost both her shoes; but she saved her doll and her picture-book. She was so near the goal, however, that this misfortune hardly troubled her. Over the little grassy plain she ran, as if she had been beginning instead of ending her journey; but when she came to the true forest she was dismayed to find no entrance. On every side she was met by a wall of

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thorns and brambles and briars, through which only a weasel could make a way, or a woodman with an axe. However, she found a broad path like an avenue bordering the forest, and this she followed, looking carefully all the time for a break in the wall of underwood.

It was now well on in the evening, and would soon be quite dark. A low hum and faint muffled noises came out of the forest, and fear began to make Harolda's heart flutter. She was thinking, half gladly, that perhaps she would find no way in, when a moaning like that of a woman in distress began close beside her, and at the same time a dark opening appeared between two blackthorn bushes. Her first impulse was to run away; then she burst into tears, feeling how tired she was, and remembering that she had lost her shoes, and that she was many miles from home in a lonely wood all by herself, and the night fast approaching.

The moaning grew louder and more distressing. 'Poor woman!' thought Harolda, 'she may be dying. Perhaps I can help her.' Without more ado, and the tears still running down her cheeks, she went in by

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the dark opening between the blackthorn bushes, and came at once upon the woman who was moaning so bitterly. Harolda could see that the woman's clothes were ragged, and that her gray hair was dishevelled; but the face of the woman was hidden on her knees as she rocked herself to and fro.

'My baby!' she moaned; 'my boy! His eyes were like pansies, and his laugh was like the brook's. Where have they hidden him?'

Harolda shuddered and clasped her doll; if her doll were to be taken from her, she would lament like that, she knew. Her heart would certainly break if she were to lose her doll for ever and ever. She couldn't remember a time when she didn't have it. Its wooden face was chipped, and all the paint gone except the pupil of one eye; but it had slept in her bosom every night for five years; she had dressed it in its best clothes for the journey; and she loved it so much. It was the only thing she had in the world to love now! It was her baby; and she did pity with all her heart this poor woman who had lost hers.

'Oh, my boy, my little boy!' moaned the

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woman, suddenly flinging up her head and staring in front of her. 'Lost! lost!'

Harolda shuddered again. In the dim light she could just see the woman's face—the eyes and the hollow cheeks, so hopeless and so full of pain. Her little heart ached with sympathy, all the more because the woman was very like the old lady who had told her fairy tales.

'Poor woman!' she said; and then, without thinking that she was bereaving herself, she went up to her, and laid her doll on the woman's knees.

'What!' cried the woman, clutching it and holding it out at arm's length. 'My baby! my boy!' and she hugged it in her arms and wrapped it in her shawl.

'Oh, my dolly!' moaned Harolda, realizing what she had done.

She made a motion with outstretched arms, as if to reclaim her property; but the woman seemed not to see her, and began to hum a lullaby:

'Where shall my little one play in his childhood?  
Swing him a cradle deep in the wildwood,  
Where the timid squirrel abides,  
And the frightened roe-deer hides,  
Where the bronzy slow-worm crawls,  
And the mousing owlet calls.'

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As she sang, an extraordinary change came over her. Her gray hair changed to gold ; her hollow cheeks filled out ; sparks of fire seemed to run this way and that through her rags ; and before the verse was finished she stood up in the greenwood, a beautiful fairy in glistening robes. And more wonderful still, Harolda's doll had become a little boy baby, with eyes like pansies and a laugh like a rippling brook. It was quite dark now, but Harolda saw the fairy and the changeling clearly by the light that shone from their dresses and their hair and their eyes.

'Oh !' cried Harolda from the very bottom of her heart, clasping her hands, and letting her book fall in her astonishment and delight.

'Your book has fallen, little girl,' said the fairy. 'Pick it up and give it to my baby.'

Harolda did as she was told at once ; and the baby clutched the book, and crowed and sucked the corners.

Then the fairy took off a satchel of sewed work with a silver mount, and a pearl embroidered belt which she wore, and gave them to Harolda, and told her to put them on. When Harolda had fastened the belt with trembling fingers round her waist, she

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was told to open the satchel and take out the things that were in it. The first thing that she took out was a diamond as big as a large bean, and it shone like a glow-worm in her hand.

‘Do you remember,’ said the fairy, ‘when you found that the little wood was not the forest, how two great tears rolled down your cheeks?’

‘No,’ said Harolda, who remembered about the wood, but had forgotten all about her tears.

‘Never mind,’ said the fairy, ‘take out the other one.’

Sure enough, when Harolda put her hand into the satchel again, she found a second diamond as large as the first.

‘These are your two tears,’ said the fairy. ‘Put in your hand again. Now, what do you feel?’

‘I feel as if the little bag were full of peas and barley,’ replied Harolda.

‘Take out a handful,’ said the fairy.

Harolda took out a handful, and found that the things like peas and barley were pearls of various sizes, but all of the first water. Some of them fell on the ground, and first

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they changed into dewdrops, and then into daisies.

‘These pearls,’ said the fairy, ‘are the shower of tears you shed a little while ago, when you heard me crying. Now put them all back.’

When Harolda had replaced the pearls and the diamonds in the satchel and shut it up, the fairy said :

‘I have only one gift to give you, for these pearls and diamonds were your own from the first. You shall henceforth have the power of seeing in the dark. Turn your back to me and close your eyes.’

Harolda obeyed at once, and the fairy said :

‘Count twenty, open your eyes, and go straight forward till you meet Irkanda, the great enchantress, whom you must obey as you have obeyed me.’

As soon as Harolda had counted twenty, she looked behind her; but the fairy and her baby and the picture-book had vanished. She was not dismayed, however, feeling certain that she would see them again. Besides, all her thoughts were taken up with her satchel and its contents, with her new gift

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of sight by night, and with the expectation of meeting the enchantress, Irkanda. She could see as clearly as in the daytime, only everything had a very strange appearance; she thought it must be like walking at the bottom of the sea. A way seemed to open up for her, and she went on and on until at last she thought she could go no farther, for her stockings were torn to threads, and her feet were bleeding; she hadn't eaten anything for hours, and it was long past her bed-time. Suddenly she saw, a little to one side, a double green light. Towards this she went, being now quite fearless, and imagining that it was for her guidance. When she came to it she found that the double green light was in the top of a pollard oak-tree; but what it was doing there, and what help it could be to her, she could not conceive, because there was no way past the oak-tree. Then, to her horror, when she tried to retrace her steps she was unable to find the path she had left, or any path. About her on every side the blackthorn rose like a wall, and behind it the trees clustered like a palisade.

‘I've lost my way!’ she cried, sinking on



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her knees, and forgetting altogether that this was a thing she had hoped to do, like little girls she had read of.

‘Where do you want to go to?’ asked a harsh voice from the top of the pollard-oak, while the double green light rose up in the air and then dropped to the ground.

The green lights were the eyes of a large dog-fox that had been resting, as is the manner of foxes, in the top of the pollard-tree. Now, this fox was not a true fox, but the wicked enchanter Declarabol, who was in the habit of taking the forms of beasts, and birds, and reptiles in order to pry into and thwart, if possible, the good purposes of the enchantress Irkanda, whom he hated.

‘I am seeking the enchantress Irkanda,’ said Harolda.

‘I can take you to her,’ said the fox—or, rather, Declarabol—as softly as he could, wagging his tail with unfeigned delight.

As a rule, he found it difficult to overcome the suspicions of those he wished to betray; but Harolda was so enraptured at finding herself in the true forest, where the fairies dwell and the beasts can speak, that she never thought of doubting the fox’s good faith.

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‘What have you in your little bag?’ asked Declarabol.

‘Oh, my tears,’ answered Harolda quite truthfully, but not wishing to tell the fox everything.

‘Humph!’ rejoined Declarabol, not by any means satisfied with Harolda’s reply, but afraid to say more lest he should arouse her suspicions.

Then Declarabol, who had by enchantment closed up the path, opened it again, and led Harolda through the thicket to the way which the good fairy had told her to follow. This wicked magician was very sly and wary. Harolda was no concern of his; it was Irkanda whom he wished to damage; so he judged it best for his plans to bring the little girl safely to the great enchantress, in the hope of finding out what new scheme for the good of Fairyland Irkanda had on hand.

‘This,’ said Declarabol, stopping suddenly, and pointing with his nose to a knoll on which a hawthorn grew, ‘is the house of Irkanda. You must knock at the door.’

The door, which was of bronze, richly decorated in low relief, stood in the side of

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the knoll, and when Harolda knocked, it swung open with a musical sound. The fox trotted in at once, and she followed ; whereupon the door swung to—again with a musical sound.

Harolda found herself in a large low room with a groined ceiling, like the crypt of a church. A single silver lamp hung by silver chains from the centre of the roof ; in it burned a sweet-smelling oil, and the light had a rosy hue. There was tapestry on the walls ; strange implements were strewn about the floor ; and at the back of the room Irkanda sat on a couch of tigers' skins, spinning a golden thread in the old-fashioned manner without a wheel ; and she sang this song as she spun :

‘ The world spins round, and the moon ;  
And the sun spins round itself ;  
And this is my distaff tune,  
As I twirl the shining pelf.

‘ The spider spins in the furze,  
And the dew begems his net ;  
Fate's unseen spindle whirrs,  
And the thread with blood is wet.

‘ But tears nor blood shall stain,  
Nor rust of death or sin,  
The thread of golden grain  
I spin, I spin.’

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The deep low singing of the great enchantress overpowered Harolda, and she stood like a statue. Declarabol trembled as he always did in the presence of Irkanda, for she was stronger than he, and was his mistress in all the arts of sorcery and witchcraft, although she used them only for blameless ends. But while Declarabol trembled, he was no coward. It is possible to be sick with terror, and yet to go on unflinchingly braving the cause of the terror; and this is possible to the worst as to the best.

Irkanda sang her song several times before she laid her distaff by. She ceased singing and spinning at the same time, and then, without looking at Harolda, she said:

‘Give me one of your diamonds.’

‘Diamonds!’ thought Declarabol, as he watched Harolda open her satchel and give one of her transformed tears to the enchantress; ‘the girl is not such a simpleton, after all.’

As soon as she had it, Irkanda struck a bell that lay on the couch beside her, and a little gnome appeared dressed in russet with a red nightcap on his head.

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‘Bring Harolda,’ said Irkanda, ‘the Untiring Shoes.’

The gnome vanished, and reappeared again almost instantaneously with three companions, carrying among them a pair of shoes, each of which was as big as Harolda’s whole body.

‘They were last worn by a giant,’ said Irkanda. ‘Step into them, Harolda.’

Harolda hesitated a second, but remembering how the fairy had told her to obey Irkanda promptly, she put her feet into the enormous shoes, which immediately shrank to the exact size of her feet; at the same time all her sense of weariness left her, and she felt as if she could fly.

‘Give me the other diamond,’ said Irkanda. ‘Bring a vial of the Aroma of Life,’ she continued, when Harolda had given her the second diamond.

In a moment one of the gnomes had brought a small green vial, which he handed to Harolda.

‘Bring me Harolda’s pearls,’ said Irkanda.

One of the gnomes took off his nightcap, and when Harolda had emptied the pearls into it, he carried them to the enchantress,

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who received them in a satchel of her own, larger, but of the same make as Harolda's.

'Now,' continued Irkanda, 'in these Un-tiring Shoes, you could easily walk round the world without a halt. When you are sleepy or thirsty, or your spirits are low, smell the Aroma of Life, or put a drop of it on your tongue, and you will be immediately refreshed.'

Harolda, who was very dizzy and thirsty, took out the stopper of the vial, and smelt the aroma, and tasted it also: the scent made her feel as if she had just come out of the sea, and been rubbed down with a flesh-brush; and the taste sent an exquisite thrill along all her nerves, and seemed to expand her whole body and mind. Irkanda smiled indulgently as Harolda was testing the effects of the contents of the vial, and then said:

'When you are hungry, put your hand in your satchel, and you will find food.'

Harolda, who was quite famished for want of something to eat, thrust her hand into her satchel, and brought out a little cake of a glistening white colour streaked with crimson. It was hardly bigger than a crown piece, which disappointed her very much, as she

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had never been so hungry in her life before. Then she thought that perhaps the satchel might be full of food ; so she put her hand in again, but brought it forth empty. With a sigh she began to nibble the edge of the cake, and, behold, she had never tasted anything like it before ! It seemed to savour of everything she liked best. In three seconds she finished it, and, to her astonishment, her hunger was quite satisfied ; and yet, although she felt that the ripest peach would hardly tempt her to eat again at that time, she had none of the miserable sensations she had sometimes experienced on Christmas Day after dinner.

‘ Fox, fox, fox,’ said Irkanda, ‘ are you a good fox and true ?’

‘ The truest fox in the forest, O Irkanda,’ replied Declarabol.

It was the case that Irkanda, on account of her greatness of soul, was as easily deceived as a child : that was the sole advantage Declarabol had over her. Nevertheless Irkanda was the most wonderful enchantress that ever lived.

‘ Swear by the crab-apple, the hawthorn, and the mistletoe, to lead Harolda safe into

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Fairyland, with all the beasts to guard her,' said Irkanda in a terrible voice.

'I swear,' replied Declarabol huskily, while he shook like a leaf.

The door then swung open of itself with a musical sound, and Harolda and Declarabol returned once more to the forest and the night; and just as the door closed behind them they heard Irkanda resume her distaff and her song:

'The spider spins in the furze,  
And the dew begems his net;  
Fate's unseen spindle whirrs,  
And the thread with tears is wet.'

Declarabol trotted through the forest at a great rate, and Harolda in her Untiring Shoes easily kept pace with him. In a deep hollow Declarabol halted, and told Harolda to wait for him while he went to summon the beasts to guard her into Fairyland.

Now, Declarabol had no intention of fulfilling his oath. Once out of sight of Harolda, he rubbed himself against a mountain-ash, and straightway appeared in his own proper person, which was that of a black man with wings like a bat and horns like a goat. Mounting into the air, he flew to the north



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end of the forest and alighted at the door of a hut, in which, although it was now after midnight, a light still burned. He folded his wings and entered without knocking.

‘Declarabol!’ said Rabbitskin, the inhabitant of the hut, as soon as he heard the latch lifted; ‘I know by the itching of my ears.’

Rabbitskin was a foolish, ill-instructed enchanter whom Declarabol often employed. Like most foolish people, he was very vain, and was constantly imposing on himself. Nobody ever visited him after midnight, except Declarabol; and as Declarabol had always something to tell him when he came, and, as a rule, an advantageous proposal to make, the itching of his ears can be understood quite well.

With great gravity and self-importance he said to Declarabol, ‘By my art I knew it was you.’

‘Ha!’ said Declarabol, who always flattered Rabbitskin when he had need of his services, ‘there’s no deceiving you, Rabbitskin. If you only had a fair chance, old fellow, I believe you would outstrip us all.’

Rabbitskin chuckled, and dished the stew

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which was simmering on the fire into two porringers; and two spoons were soon as busy as two hungry enchanters could ply them.

‘And now to business,’ said Declarabol, when he had finished his portion. ‘Irkanda has some grand scheme afoot.’

‘About the lost King and Queen of Fairyland?’

‘Perhaps. A little girl has come into the forest, and Irkanda has given her the Untiring Shoes and the Aroma of Life, and caused a cake of manna to be in her satchel whenever she is hungry. She has further instructed a fox to gather the beasts together to guard this little girl into Fairyland. If Harolda is the lost Queen, and should get back to her kingdom, it’s all up with us.’

‘How so?’ asked Rabbitskin.

‘Because,’ answered Declarabol, ‘the interregnum in Fairyland would come to an end, and with the restoration of authority we should be reduced to the state of impotence in which we were eight years ago; for all the forests would be so jealously guarded and the air so filled with counter-spells that

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we should be unable to move either hand or foot.'

'But,' said Rabbitskin, 'if the Queen is only a little girl, what would it matter?'

'Man alive!' exclaimed Declarabol, losing patience. 'The Queen a little girl! The Queen was enchanted!'

'Ah! ah!' rejoined Rabbitskin meditatively. He knew nothing about history, and never read the *Sorcerer's Herald*, and yet was afraid to show his ignorance.

'I see you understand nothing of the matter,' said Declarabol. 'You must know, then, that it is a hundred years since the chief wicked enchanters and evil spirits in the world conspired together to put the King and Queen of Faery under a spell. In spite of all their efforts, it was only eight years ago that they succeeded. How it was done I don't know; I was just out of my apprenticeship then, and the secret was not confided to me—much to my own satisfaction now, for every enchanter and evil spirit who took part in the conspiracy died within a year in lingering agonies. That was Irkanda's doing; she was then just coming to the front as an enchantress. Great as

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she is, she has been eight years trying to find out the nature of the enchantment of the King and Queen of Faery, and I don't believe she ever will. When she began to kill off the conspirators, ever so many of them offered to tell the secret if she would spare them; but in her pride she wouldn't hear of it, declaring that her own art was sufficient. Enchanted the King and Queen of Faery are, thanks to the glorious dead; no one has heard tell of them since the day of their disappearance; and along with them vanished The Book of the Laws of Fairyland.'

'Ay, ay,' said Rabbitskin.

'Well, then, whether this little girl has anything to do with the enchantment of the King and Queen of Faery or not, I can't say; but that Irkanda favours her is enough for me. Now while this fox is away gathering together the beasts, the little girl waits in a den well known to me. I want to turn you into a fox, and to carry you on my back to the little girl before the other fox brings the beasts together. You will then lead her to my cave, and I shall take care of her after that.'

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‘And what will you give me?’

‘Give you? I’ll give you the power of making withered oak-leaves into gold.’

‘You will!’ cried Rabbitskin, astonished at the unusual liberality of his employer. ‘Come on!’

Declarabol pronounced a spell in a terrible language, and in less than a minute Rabbitskin stood on four legs, a dog-fox of the very fur in which Declarabol himself had lately walked the forest. Having extinguished the lamp and the fire, Declarabol led the way out; and, with Rabbitskin on his shoulders, spread his wings and flew back to within a short distance of the den where he had left Harolda. There he deposited Rabbitskin, gave him some final instructions, and took flight to his own place.

So rapid had been the passage of Declarabol to and from the hut of Rabbitskin, the enchanters had despatched their supper so expeditiously, and struck up their bargain so promptly, that Harolda had to wait barely twenty minutes for the return of the fox.

‘Oh, dear fox,’ she said, when Rabbitskin appeared, looking from the tips of his ears

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to the tip of his tail in every hue and hair exactly as Declarabol had looked in the same disguise, 'I am so glad you have come back. But where are the beasts?'

'They are all assembled half a mile from here waiting for us,' replied Rabbitskin. 'Were you frightened?'

'No,' rejoined Harolda, 'only very, very impatient. I have taken two drops of the Aroma of Life, and eaten another cake, and I could hardly keep my legs from running away. Oh! how I long to get to Fairyland, for there I shall see my dolly again turned into a baby boy, with eyes like pansies and a laugh like a little brook! Come away, dear fox.'

'Ha! hum!' muttered Rabbitskin to himself. 'A fine Fairyland Declarabol has ready for her, I bet my brush! Serve her jolly well right, too, interfering minx! As quick as you like,' he said aloud; and they set off at a pace which only the fleetest creatures can maintain for any time at all. 'Here we are!' he cried in a minute or two, stopping at a knoll like that in which Irkanda lived, but smaller. 'You must knock at the door.'

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Harolda knocked, and the door, which was of oak studded with iron nails, opened at once, screeching on its hinges. She was about to enter, when a hideous yell arose immediately behind her. Looking round in alarm, she saw the figures of three animals rolling on the turf. What they were doing she could not make out, they wriggled so; but at last the fox rolled over dead, and two polecats, who had bitten through his neck on either side, slunk off into the forest. By this time Declarabol, in his own shape, had come out of his knoll. He smiled when he saw the fox lying dead, and uttered an odd cry. After a short interval an answer came from some distance, and soon four horned owls flew up on noiseless wings. They perched on a low branch of an old oak that grew near Declarabol's knoll, and said, one after the other, slowly, gravely, and under their breath, as it were, 'Towhit, towhoo! Towhit, towhoo! Towhit, towhoo! Towhit, towhoo!' And their eight orange-coloured eyes sparkled in the midst of the feathery discs on either side of their black beaks like carbuncles in brooches of tarnished gold.

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Declarabol addressed them briefly in the beasts' argot, and in tones of command. Without delay they came down from the tree, and two taking the fox by the fore-legs and two by the hind-legs, they mounted into the air and flew away with him.

Then Declarabol uttered a spell and passed his hand twice in front of Harolda's face; and when she tried to ask him what it all meant, she found she was unable to speak; nor could she cause any sound at all to issue from her mouth. Declarabol dragged her across his threshold, and, having closed and barred the door, thrust her into an iron cage, which stood ready in the middle of the room.

Keeping back her tears and holding her breath, Harolda watched Declarabol. The enchanter went to a cupboard, from which he took a long slim bottle and a green glass with a crooked stem. Having seated himself on a low chair under the bronze lamp, which hung by bronze chains from the ceiling, he thrice filled the glass with a dancing yellow liquor, and drank it off to the dregs each time, chuckling and eyeing Harolda with glances that made her blood run cold.



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‘Well,’ he said, settling himself in his chair, ‘whoever you are, I’ve caught you nicely. Oh! I’ve done a good night’s work, for the fox that led you through the forest is dead—killed and carried off by my slaves, and laid where Irkanda’s folk will find him; and then a certain enchanter, who thought no end of himself, and knew a little more of my secrets than I cared about, has vanished unaccountably, and without learning how to make withered oak-leaves into gold, either. A good night’s work! A very, very good night’s work! And now I wonder what I shall do with you, my little dear. Shall I keep you and make terms for myself, or shall I kill you to spite Irkanda? That’s what this shall determine. When I have dreamt an hour,’ he went on, after drinking another glass of the yellow liquor, ‘I shall know what I must do.’

And immediately he fell asleep.

Harolda was on the point of fainting with terror, when she remembered her vial. She sniffed it and took a drop of it, and recovered her courage at once. But in a little while the dreadful snoring of Declarabol so worked upon her excited nerves that she was glad

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to have recourse again to the Aroma of Life. She kept tasting it and putting it to her nostrils, for the effect of it was wonderfully exhilarating, making her feel not so much as if she didn't care, but as if she had the power to do whatever she chose. The extraordinary sense of expansion, both of body and mind, became so pleasant with the continuous tasting and smelling of the aroma, that at last, beside herself with delight, she drank off half the vial. Then a marvel took place, such as Harolda had never heard or read of: she began to grow, sensibly and visibly; all her limbs, her body, her neck, her head, shot up and filled out, like some flower an Eastern enchanter causes to spring and blossom in a minute. She had no growing pains, but it seemed as if her nerves and muscles twanged and hummed as they extended with her body, while the blood sang in all her veins. In a few minutes her head struck the roof of the cage. Faint and afraid, she bent herself at first, but after drinking the rest of the vial she stood erect again, happy and confident. Sure enough, her head burst through the iron bars of the cage; and, in a little while, as a butterfly breaks

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its chrysalis, she stepped out of it altogether—a wonderful creature, taller than women are, more exquisitely shaped, and much more beautiful to behold. Her dress also had changed, and she now wore purple robes of the finest texture, embroidered with gold; she had on golden sandals, and her belt and satchel had grown with her growth. Her wonder at her transformation was still only dawning, when Declarabol, disturbed by the breaking of the cage, wakened, rubbed his eyes, and stared about him.

‘Sarapapapapai!’ he shrieked, starting up, when he saw the cage in ruins.

But when he beheld Harolda standing majestic, beautiful, and fearless in the midst of the cave, he threw up his hands and fell to the floor a gibbering idiot. Harolda looked at him in disgust for a second or two; then she unbarred the door and went out into the forest. She wanted to shout, she wanted to laugh, she wanted to sing; but the spell was on her, and she could utter no sound of any kind. As she walked about among the trees, the rapture of her whole being found expression in eloquent movements of her arms, and golden glances

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rained from her eyes on every hand. A brown owl, flying overhead, noticed her gracious movements and the stateliness of her carriage, and, being an inquisitive owl, he perched on a tree to see her pass. No sooner did he catch sight of Harolda's face than he rose into the air with a wild scream of delight and flew off. Harolda wondered a little, but went on her way ravished with the depths of darkness and mysterious noises of the forest, and with the beauty of the night. When she came to a wide glade that sloped up before her like an amphitheatre, she felt constrained to stand still and wait for a little.

'Something else is about to happen,' she said to herself.

She had paused only for a few seconds, when a new murmur and rustle began afar off and near at hand: the whole forest had become suddenly alive. Soon in every glade and by-way resounded the patter and drumming of feet and hoofs, and the swish and whirr of wings sped over the tree-tops like a rainy shower. Hoof and paw, on they came like rivulets running to the sea; and above, the darkening feathers gathered like clouds.

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The first to reach the amphitheatre were the fallow deer. Their shining eyes and dun coats soon filled up a space about Harolda ; and after a little jostling and scraping, they all lay down as close together as they could, every swart flank heaving like a wave of the sea. Then came the little ruddy roe-deer, shyest of creatures, in ones and twos and threes ; actually bashful in the presence of each other, they crouched dispersedly on the outskirts of the amphitheatre. The foxes slunk in next, and sat about on their haunches, with their heads innocently dropped on one side. Hares and rabbits crowded together ; and polecats, water-rats and otters arrived in a batch ; the stoat, the weasel, and the marten wriggled through the crowd to the very front ; the badger and the hedgehog elbowed a way in ; the dormice, and the fieldmice, and the shrews ran hither and thither ; and the scaly, yellow-stained snake, the brown viper, and the burnished slow-worm crawled to Harolda's feet. While the area of the amphitheatre filled up in this way, the clouds of birds took their places in the galleries, as the surrounding trees may be

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called : falcons, owls, ravens, shrikes, rooks, jackdaws, crows, magpies, jays, starlings, ousels, thrushes, blackbirds, sparrows, finches, nuthatches, woodpeckers, linnets, larks, wrens, titmice, swallows, doves, plovers, snipes, curlews, in the tree-tops and on the high branches and on the low branches, head to tail, wing to wing, a shining galaxy of eyes in a firmament of feathers. And the squirrels were among the birds, and the partridges and the pheasants among the beasts.

When every creature had found a place and perfect silence reigned, Harolda, knowing intuitively that the assembly had come together to see her, and feeling, without knowing why, that it was her duty to make a speech, opened her mouth, and was about to try to begin, 'Dear beasts and birds.' Remembering, however, that she had lost the power of utterance, she buried her face in her hands and burst into tears. A deep murmur of sympathy broke from the ground and the trees, which Harolda mistook for an impatient grumble. She therefore raised her face, and, by gestures, tried to indicate that she was dumb. At first her audience were

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puzzled; but when they understood, a cry of rage broke out which it is impossible to imagine or describe. Then all the beasts and birds talked at once, discussing the position in the most excited manner. But while the babel of tongues was at its highest an antlered form appeared beside Harolda. The assembly, beholding it, burst into a shout of joy, which was followed by an attentive silence. Now, this antlered form was the *doyen* of Epping Forest, the only red-deer surviving there. He was over a hundred years old, and his existence was denied by all the keepers, and doubted even by some of the beasts. But there he was, a late arrival, come from the most secluded part of his 'native dwelling-place' to advise his brethren in their need. In his stormy old voice, that seemed to throb with the tempests of a century, he said, 'We are too many to consult together. Send me a snake, a raven, and a badger, and we shall determine what is to be done.'

With but little delay the delegates were selected, and the four creatures retired behind a thicket to take counsel with one another. They were gone only a few minutes, and on

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their return the stag announced their decision.

‘We shall all rise up together and take her to Fairyland,’ he said; and the decision was received with acclaim.

The stag knelt down, and Harolda, understanding, got upon his back. Then the raven fastened round his antlers a strong withe which served as a bridle; and the brown owl who had announced Harolda’s arrival was honoured with a perch on the stag’s head. The birds were the first to set out; they rose like a dense exhalation from the trees, and flew off in a wide straggling cloud with shrill cries and clangour. The sound of their flight was still loud above the forest when the stag took the road. He walked right through the amphitheatre, the animals opening a lane for him, and then forming up behind in a mixed but orderly procession. As for Harolda, it mattered little that she was unable to speak, because her wonder and delight were beyond words. Yet she felt every moment as if she were about to utter something, and as if momentous things that she had long forgotten were about to waken up in her mind.



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They had scarcely gone half a mile—it seemed so, at least, to Harolda—when a great gray cup, held out in the east, was filled with the crimson wine of dawn; and from the east, too, was seen coming towards them more swiftly than the wind a black cloud. Soon they saw that the cloud was the return of the birds. Having announced in Fairyland Harolda's progress, they had put about again; and when the birds and beasts met, the former, separating into two divisions, hung on the flanks of the march for the rest of the way.

And as they went along there came to their ears in snatches an enchanting sound of music. This, the birds told the beasts, was fairy music; for, they said, 'the whole fairy nation is coming to meet us with drums and trumpets, cymbals and triangles, and ancient psalteries and dulcimers, the strings of which are moonbeams and sunbeams.' The procession increased its pace at this great news, and shortly the borderland of Faery came in sight. Harolda had hardly done feasting her eyes on the rich green meadows and bowers that lay before her, when the fairy outriders appeared over the

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crest of a low hill, and at the same time the sun rose up at once into the sky. After the outriders came the minstrels in a chariot of pearl, decorated with ocean gems that are unknown outside of Fairyland. Then followed the whole body of the fairy cavalry, clad in gold and silver mail, and riding on horses that were either wholly black or wholly white. A great chariot of ivory, decorated with gold and all kinds of precious stones, came next ; it was drawn by six white horses, and in it there sat three persons. Behind marched the infantry, with bows and arrows, swords and bucklers, in flashing helmets and glittering harness ; and behind them, again, in crowds and companies, on foot and on horseback, flocked the fairy nation. The separate splendours of the divisions of the army, of the chariots, and of the gaily attired companies, all blended into a rich, soft beauty of colour and form that entranced the eyes of every bird and beast.

The earthly creatures came to a halt on the edge of the world, for although they are subject to Fairyland, and although the birds may fly into the air of Faery, nothing earthly may set foot on its soil ; while on their side

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the fairies halted just on the border of their territory. Straightway a figure stepped from the ivory chariot, and came towards the beasts. This was the fairy, as Harolda quickly perceived, who had met her first in the forest in the guise of a woman weeping. She came up to Harolda accompanied by a body-guard of archers, and helped her to descend from the back of the stag. Then she led her to the ivory chariot, while the whole fairy nation shouted with joy again and again, and the minstrels played a triumphal march that thrilled the listeners with delight to the marrow of their bones. In the chariot sat Irkanda, and the most beautiful youth any bird or beast, or body or fairy, ever beheld.

The beautiful youth assisted Harolda into the chariot, and made her sit down beside him.

Then Irkanda arose, and, resting on her distaff, spoke in a clear voice that was distinctly heard by every creature on both sides of the borderland. She reminded her double audience how their King and Queen had been enchanted and spirited away eight years before ; she told them also, what they had

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long guessed, how she, Irkanda, by her spells had caused all the conspirators to perish miserably, and had then applied herself to the discovery of the condition of their King and Queen.

‘I will not now divulge,’ she said, ‘nor shall I ever divulge to any one, the marvelously ingenious and all but inextricably involved enchantment, or, rather, series of enchantments, by which those wicked sorcerers and evil spirits worked their infamous will. Were I to reveal the secret, it would endanger the State. Happily, these subtle devices, the perfecting of which occupied for ninety-two years hundreds of the most unscrupulous and most powerful minds, are never likely to be reinvented. This only I can tell you: Your King and Queen, my most gracious master and mistress, were to be changed into cheap wooden dolls, in which shape, after having amused some thoughtless children for a year or two, they would have been inevitably burnt up in a patent stove. The enchantment succeeded perfectly with the King, but with the Queen it failed; by some extraordinary and beneficent mistake,

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she was changed into a baby instead of into a doll. Had it not been for this happy error, I question if I should have succeeded in disenchanting them. Fortunately, it required only a very simple spell to bring the royal pair together—the King as the doll of the Queen. The difficulty lay here: Such was the diabolical ingenuity of the dead conspirators, that a restoration could not be effected by force. However, my sister, the fairy Urgala, in the guise of an old woman, filled the mind of your enchanted Queen with such an overpowering desire to see Fairyland that she set out to reach it of her own accord, bringing the King, her dearly-loved doll, with her. I should have told you that the conspirators completed, as they thought, their nefarious designs, by enchanting The Book of the Laws of Faery into a toy picture-book. That also I brought into the possession of our Queen, and she, most adorable of enchanted princesses—now happily disenchanted—carried it with her when she set out unwittingly to find her kingdom; and it is now once more safe in the muniment-room of the royal palace. We were sadly tempted

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in the forest, my sister and I, to seize upon the royal pair and carry them straight to you, for we knew of the dangers that beset their majesties, but we dared not because of the enchantment. The great soul of our Queen helped us through all ; she did whatever we bade her, whatever we asked, fearlessly and trustfully, and it is to her, to her alone, that this great and happy restoration is due ; and after her to the Aroma of Life, which quickly gave again to the royal pair their own beautiful and majestic forms.'

With that Irkanda placed crowns of gold on the heads of the King and Queen ; and the beautiful, awe-struck, but radiant pair stood up and bowed graciously to their fairy and to their earthly subjects, who hailed them with frantic shouts of ' Long live the King and Queen ! Long live the King and Queen !'

And the King spoke loving words to his consort ; but she, trying in vain to reply, burst into tears. Whereupon the King kissed her tenderly and pressed her to his bosom, and at once Declarabol's spell was broken, and she murmured, between two joyful sobs :

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‘My husband!’

The procession started immediately to return to the capital of Fairyland, with triumphal music and triumphal shouts. But Irkanda crossed over the borderland to the beasts, although the Queen begged her to stay.

‘My sister Urgala goes with you,’ said Irkanda, ‘and she can communicate with me, if danger threatens, in the thousandth part of a second.’

So the Queen kissed Irkanda on both cheeks; and she also kissed both her hands to the beasts and the birds as her chariot moved away. And all the creatures stood silently watching the fairies until they passed out of sight over the crest of the low hill. Then, with the great enchantress and the old stag at their head, they went back to Epping Forest, and all the way Irkanda spun her golden thread and sang her magic song:

‘The world spins round, and the moon;  
And the sun spins round itself;  
And this is my distaff tune,  
As I twirl the shining pelf.

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‘ The spider spins in the furze,  
And the dew begems his net ;  
Fate’s unseen spindle whirrs,  
And the thread with blood is wet.

‘ But tears nor blood shall stain,  
Nor rust of death or sin,  
The thread of golden grain  
I spin, I spin.’

THE END.



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